

# How To Survive An Italian Wedding

by LilyBartAndTheOthers

Category: Rizzoli & Isles

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: J. Rizzoli, M. Isles

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-11 10:50:07

Updated: 2016-04-27 10:56:19

Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:57:37

Rating: K+

Chapters: 17

Words: 29,815

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: "It's just a wedding... What could possibly go wrong?" Maura asked. Jane snorted. "Everything." - Jane's cousin, Gina, is getting married. The Italian way. In order to overcome the Rizzoli tornado, Jane invites Maura to the event but what seems like a great plan at first may turn into something neither of them had imagined. Rizzles endgame, daily updates.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*Author's note: I hope you will enjoy this story - as usual, daily updates and reviews more than appreciated.\*\*

\*\*Part One â€“ La famiglia\*\*\*

\*\*Chapter One:\*\*

Wax slid down the red candlestick as slowly as a longing kiss before freezing in a white silence for the eternity. Captivated by the abstract form, Maura went to touch it but Jane's warning made her suddenly give up on the idea.

"You're going to burn yourself."

The softness of Jane's tone of voice appeased Maura. She remained quiet for long seconds, as if she needed time to bury her nagging desire to brush the tear of wax that had embraced the edge of the tablecloth, and only smiled back at her friend once a sentiment of well-being passed underneath her pale skin.

"It's a lovely restaurant." She glanced at the room, too furtively to really pay attention to the details though. "I like it very much, thank you for inviting me."

Jane didn't answer back. She focused on her glass of wine instead and made the purple liquid twirl between her hands. Her gesture caught

Maura's attention then gathered in a corner of her head along with the dozen of unusual details she had previously noticed.

Jane wasn't particularly at ease. She looked nervous, on the verge of confessing whatever was eating her up. Of course Maura could have been a lot more direct but she didn't feel like confronting her friend for she didn't know the nature of Jane's discomfort.

Thus she had decided to remain on a safer path made of subtlety and delicate smiles that she hoped to be auspicious and warm.

"These antipasti were delicious." Maura folded her napkin. Slowly, quietly. She then rested her chin on top of her hands to look Jane in the eye. "It's a very popular Italian restaurant. It got excellent reviews..."

"Yet it's nothing compared to Russo's."

Maura focused on an invisible point and squinted her eyes in an effort of concentration. The relief that had come along with Jane's decision to put an end to her awkward silence had turned out to be shamefully brief as she " Maura " now found herself in the incapacity to agree with her friend for she didn't know the restaurant Jane had mentioned.

"Russo's? I have never heard about it. Is it a new restaurant in town?"

An ounce of discomfort rose within Maura's question. A socialite like her was supposed to know about this kind of things. Had her job been too demanding lately that she had missed the new place-to-be? Even her mother, who had paid her a visit the month before, hadn't mentioned it.

Jane's sudden hesitation didn't reassure Maura the slightest bit. On the contrary. It only managed to make her heart beat faster and her hands get moist. Did her current clueless state of mind make her sound like an idiot?

Yet she had honestly never heard about Russo's before.

"Oh... Not really, no." Jane took a sip of wine. It was strong and the alcohol burned her throat as she gulped it down. "It's actually been runnin' for a while. I'm sure you'd love it." She paused. "You know what? Let's go there like... On May, 6th."

On May, 6th?

If Maura's patience was dangerously reaching its limits, she didn't let it show. A sincere smile played on her lips as she leaned over the table to pick up a couple of grissini. She honestly didn't understand Jane's current behavior and the hints her friend dropped here and there weren't enough for the situation to make sense. The puzzle remained incomplete.

Maura took a deep breath and tried to gather all the pieces of information she had so far: the restaurant was too chic for a down-to-earth person like Jane and the way she kept on beating about the bush was quite telling too, just like the precise date she had just suggested.

"Where is it located? Beacon Hill? The South End?" Jane was right on a point though: Maura was always eager to discover new places and new cuisines. "Back Bay?"

"Howard Beach, Queens."

Maura blinked with disbelief. Queens? Her hazel eyes fixed upon her friend's empty glass of wine. Jane hadn't drunk too quickly nor too much yet it was certainly the only reason why she would suggest Maura a trip to Queens. Or else she had definitely lost her mind.

Maura discreetly frowned as confusion invaded her.

Perhaps Jane was snowed under work. She had been investigating two cases at the same time, after all. The last few weeks had been stress inducing for her and Maura was glad to see that she had finally decided to slow down a bit tonight.

Was it too late though?

"Queens like in the New York City borough?" Maura's eyes went from right to left in a desperate attempt to find an explanation to Jane's incomprehensible remark. "Not... Not Manhattan?"

"Nope." Jane shook her head. "Howard Beach, Queens. A great place, really."

Maura sat up straight and made an effort to smile in spite of the incongruous idea. She didn't want to sound unpleasant but Queens was not on her wishlist for a getaway. Manhattan and Brooklyn were always an option but not a middle-class residential borough like Queens.

"How about a double? We try Russo's in Queens and book a hotel in Staten Island. Who knows, maybe we could start a trend?"

Sarcasm was a foreign concept to Maura's world but, proud of her unusual boldness, she burst out laughing and waited for Jane to join her along. In vain. As a matter of fact and against all expectations, the exact opposite happened: Jane pointed an index finger to Maura and nodded with great enthusiasm.

"Now that's an idea."

Maura immediately sobered up. She had had enough of this very strange little game. Jane had something in mind and she now needed to be honest.

"Spill the bean, Jane. Come on."

"The beans. It's 'spill the beans'."

Maura's hazel eyes widened as she raised both her hands to apologize. These common phrases didn't belong to her daily vocabulary. Thus she always used them wrongly.

"Well... Spill them! Why are you being so mysterious, Jane? What kind of plan do you have in mind, exactly?"

Mysterious and strange; on a seduction mission therefore the Italian restaurant instead of a casual pub like the Dirty Robber. It all made sense now in Maura's head. Jane was asking for a favor; or at least in theory because she actually wasn't going anywhere at all for now.

Jane began to play with her napkin but ended up abdicating rather quickly. Her traits became distorted under the weight of a strong embarrassment. She had to let the words come out, and now.

"It's Gina's wedding and I don't wanna show up alone." Her inaudible murmur got swept away by a long and loud sigh. "Gina's my cousin. She's the daughter of Roberta and Francesco, my mother's sister. They all live in Staten Island."

The rush of adrenalin Maura had felt stopped rather abruptly. She wouldn't let her disappointment show but she had hoped for a more significant reason to Jane's singular behavior. Who planned such evening just to ask a third party to attend a wedding?

She observed the plate the waiter had just brought and tried to find something relevant to say to her friend. Perhaps she " Maura " misunderstood the importance of the moment which would explain Jane's complicated plot.

"They think I'm a spinster."

Jane's additional remark only got Maura to laugh lightly. Jane was nothing but a spinster or if she happened to be one then she was a very modern version of it. It was ridiculous.

"You're not... Don't be so dramatic. It's perfectly fine to not be married at forty-years-old, nowadays. Besides, I'm thirty-nine-years old so what are they going to say about me?"

"Not when you're Italian-American. It's a tragedy for my family, believe me." Jane took a sip of water then shrugged as she suddenly remembered Maura's question. "Oh, they'll think you're a spinster too." She ignored the expression of horror that showed on her friend's face and went on. "You have no idea what you'll have to face if you ever accept to come to Staten Island with me. It's the Rizzoli's we're talking about. They're loud, and distrustful... And loud."

A playful smirk appeared just at the corner of Maura's lips. She took a sip of wine and looked her friend in the eye.

"You've already said it." She carefully set back her glass down on the table and ran her tongue over her lips. "Listen... You can count on me: I'll come with you. Of course, I will! I'm your friend, Jane." Maura's fingers brushed the back of Jane's hand as she went to hold it tightly. Comfortingly. "You didn't have to... Literally buy me."

"Oh yes, I had." Jane laid sorry eyes on her friend. She shook her head then let a long sigh pass her lips. "Even ma' looks discreet compared to them. It's..."

A smile of empathy lit up Maura's features. She didn't believe a word of what Jane was saying. It couldn't be possible. Her friend was

simply exaggerating, as she often did.

"Oh, please... It's just a wedding." Maura shook her head with disbelief before a peaceful laugh to pass her lips. "What could possibly go wrong?"

Jane snorted and picked up her fork with a more or less controlled frustration. She stared at her penne for long seconds and only spoke again once the wave of bitterness that had hit her started going away.

"Everything."

...

\*\*\_La famiglia: the family\_\*\*

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews (the use of the name Rizzoli will be explained in tomorrow's chapter).\*\*

\*\*Chapter Two:\*\*

Disillusioned, Maura observed the fields on her right and sighed. They looked like a ribbon of yellow, an endless one. Monotone and bare.

"I still don't understand why you insisted so much on driving all the way to Staten Island." She glanced at Jane then crossed her arms against her chest. "Flying to New York was the best option!"

Jane passed a Toyota and tightened her grip on the steering-wheel. They had left Boston an hour and a half ago, in the first hours of the morning. If the traffic remained as fluid as it now was, they would reach New York City around 7pm.

"C'mon, Maura... There's nothing like a roadtrip!"

The way Maura raised an eyebrow and smirked only highlighted her complete lack of enthusiasm. The roles within their friendship had been reversed: for once, Jane was the happy-go-lucky side of their dynamic when she was the grumpy one.

Yet she could hardly say that she was the one to blame as Jane had let her know at the last moment that they would drive their way to New York instead of flying there.

The last few weeks had been carried by a peculiar frenzy. As soon as Angela had come back from her trip to Atlantic City with some friends, she had tried to teach Maura the art of an Italian wedding. Jane, however, had desperately run away from the whole thing.

"I don't know." Maura shrugged but a twinkle in her eyes betrayed her inner feelings. "It didn't turn out well for Thelma and Louise."

The movie reference caused Jane to smile. Not breaking eye-contact with the road, she motioned the backpack she had dropped on the

backseat.

"There's something for you in it. Go get it."

Surprise soon turned into a smile of excitement that lit up Maura's graceful features. Thrilled, she grabbed the aforesaid backpack and opened it.

She and Jane hadn't talked much about the next five days. Jane had simply created a family tree to make sure that her friend would be able to put a name on every single face and she had politely answered whatever question had crossed Maura's mind. Yet she had remained vague, and brief.

"What is..." The sound of wrapping paper getting torn filled the car until Maura managed to read the title on the book cover. "How to Survive an Italian Wedding." She rolled her eyes and hit Jane's shoulder with the small guide book. "You're an idiot."

"Oh no, I'm not. Believe me: you're gonna need this... Just as you're gonna need this roadtrip to read this book. Then I'll know you're ready to face what's coming."

Maura made herself comfortable and began to leaf through the book. Jane was right on one point: she had seven hours to kill, or at least five of them if her friend let her drive.

"This isn't nice for Gina. Your mother told me she was a sweet girl."

"But she didn't tell you about Chiara, Marissa, Enzo, Isabella, Perla, Luciano... She didn't tell you about Allegra. Gosh, she didn't even tell you about Staten Island!" A wave of anxiety pushed Jane to slightly speed up. "I shouldn't have asked you to come with me."

As much as Maura didn't have a lot of family experience, she honestly didn't understand her friend's reaction. Jane was on the verge of a nervous breakdown for no reason whatsoever. She wasn't the one who was getting married, thus she didn't have to be so nervous.

"It's just one of these family reunions, Jane. It's going to be alright." Bitterness suddenly deepened Maura's features as she leaned her head against the window and closed her eyes. "They'll probably not even notice my presence, anyway."

An awkward silence followed Maura's implicit confession. Jane cast a glance at her friend then bit her lips as regrets passed underneath her skin. She had a hard time witnessing a disarmed Maura for it dug in her heart a burning wound. Besides, everything was her fault this time. She was the one who had asked her friend to attend this wedding. Maura had simply been polite.

"Are you kidding? Ma' talks about you all the time. They're dying to meet you!"

Angela had indeed let Maura know that her siblings were looking forward to meeting her but Maura had simply assumed that Jane's mother had tried to be polite. She knew that Jane had invited her to the wedding because she was single. If Jane had been dating someone then Maura would have stayed in Boston.

"You're Italian-American, Jane. I know what it's like to be with Italian-Americans."

Jane loudly scoffed. She grabbed her coffee cup only to realize that it was already empty. They would have to stop for a refill.

"Oh no. I'm nothing Italian-American compared to them. Actually, they think we're the Boston weirdos 'cause we're not loud enough and... Not Italian enough. Do you think ma' would ask her sisters to show up two weeks prior to a wedding to help?"

Maura had to admit that Jane's question was fair. Angela had left for Staten Island a week ago in order to help her sister and her niece. As a matter of fact, she had even spent many evenings in Boston trying to supervise a couple of things. Maura had found it amusing and a tad curious.

"You make them sound like they're monsters."

"They're not monsters: they're Rizzoli's, your typical middle-class Italian-American family. Gosh, they even live in Staten Island. It can't get more Italian than that." Jane took the next exit to a gas station. They had to have coffee there. "It's the kind of experience you sadly won't forget."

Jane parked the car near the station. They both stepped out of the vehicle and began to walk towards the small building. The sun was now high in the sky, and hot. There was not a single cloud around, just a monochrome of blue that heated up the asphalt. Maura winced in disgust as the hot temperatures caused gasoline to smell stronger. She adjusted her sunglasses and sped up the pace of her steps.

"You're lucky enough to have a family. Embrace it, Jane. I mean it."

A honest smile played on Jane's lips as she looked Maura in the eye. She didn't ignore the luck her friend was talking about â€“ she even fully embraced it â€“ but she also knew that reality wasn't as bright as Maura thought it was. There was a reason why she â€“ Jane â€“ never visited her cousins, just as there was a reason why they never came to Boston either.

Yet for the sake of what one had once named family, they all put aside quarrels and personal vendettas when needed.

Jane pushed the door of the gas station and let Maura come in first. She owed many things to her friend, many things she hadn't managed to say out loud yet. As usual, her incapacity to properly express herself had plunged her in a world of shameful silence.

She had avoided talking about Gina's wedding as much as she had been able to. Maura's fair questions had turned into a delicate torture of some sort and for a brief moment Jane had even thought about cancelling everything if only to spare her friend. Showing up to the wedding all by herself would have been tough but at least Maura wouldn't have had to suffer from it.

Jane walked straight to the coffee machine and filled one of the

tallest cups the gas station had.

"The reason why I want to drive to New York is that it gives me time to get ready for the whole thing, just as it gives you time to get ready for it too. Besides, that means we'll have a car once there. You'll thank me for that once you see the area we'll stay in."

Maura frowned. She wasn't certain to understand her friend's statement as she should. The underlying tone Jane had used made her feel uncomfortable. She knew that Staten Island was a middle-class borough and that it had very little to do with Manhattan but she had made some research on Google and St George looked like a cute town.

"You want to drive to Manhattan while we can take the ferry?" It was one of Maura's top touristic attractions along with the National Lighthouse Museum. "Parking in Manhattan is a nightmare, Jane. You should reconsider it."

"Manhattan?" Jane laughed. "We'll be lucky if we even have time to see St George waterfront." Her cup of coffee in her hand, she headed towards the snacks aisle. "The wedding dinner's held at Russo's... Because it's what Italian-Americans do when they live in New York... And sadly, Russo's isn't in Manhattan but in Queens."

Maura chose two different packs of dried fruits and frowned upon Jane's decision to only get chocolate bars.

"Don't your cousins have cars?"

The nod Jane gave highlighted a quiet but strong sarcasm. She turned around to face her friend and let a smile of victory play on her lips.

"You know this tendency some people have to decorate their cars with colorful paper for a wedding?" She paused, just to make sure that Maura could now picture out what she was talking about. "Well, that's what my cousins are gonna do so unless you want to be driven in an old Mercedes that has been wrapped with toilet paper then I can tell you our car is a blessing."

Maura swallowed hard. For the very first time since she had accepted to attend this wedding, a wave of anxiety was suddenly rising within her lower stomach.

### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews, I'm glad to see you're enjoying the idea of this fic (it seems like I can't access chapter 2 reviews for the moment so I'll reply to you later on).\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Three:\*\***

Maura leaned over to read the number on the door of the suburban house: 8365. Confused, she frowned and went to check the address printed on the wedding invitation.

"It's the wrong house, Jane. Your cousin's is the next one."

Jane's fingers brushed the steering-wheel. She hadn't stopped the engine. As a matter of fact, she was ready to do a U-turn. All she was waiting for was Maura's approval. Sadly it never came. Why did people never cooperate when she quite needed them to?

"I know. Actually, the next five houses are my cousins'. They literally own the street. I've parked here because it's a dead-angle and they can't see us. Take a deep breath and close your eyes, Maura. Enjoy your last minutes of peace."

"Oh boy..." Maura laughed lightly. She was amused for she had never witnessed her friend in such a state. It was quite something. Her eyes stopped on the invitation she was still holding. "Jane, how come Gina's name is Rizzoli if she comes from your mother's side?"

The fact such detail hadn't crossed Maura's mind earlier surprised her a lot. Paying attention to this kind of things was part of her job, after all. A sentiment of vague failure invaded her and caused her to grimace.

"Roberta married a Rizzoli too, just not from the same family." Jane shrugged and opened her eyes anew. The sun was vanishing in the distance, at the end of the street. Its orange shades seemed to slide on the asphalt with grace and charm in spite of the rather monotone scenery. "Rizzoli's a rather popular name in Italy."

"Oh, I see." Maura nodded. "What other family names do your cousins have?"

"Valentini, Domani... Vitorello. But the Rizzoli's are big because Roberta popped up kids like a gremlin you'd have fed after midnight. Ma' is the odd ball in the family because she only had three kids."

The complexity of the family tree that Jane had created had surprised Maura the first time she had checked it. Her friend had a lot of cousins and a bevy of aunts and uncles. Five of them were named Francesco: it was quite telling.

"Fine." Maura paused. She focused on a mail box and waited for Jane to start driving again. In vain. "Now don't you think it's time for us to actually park in front of the right house?"

They couldn't remain hidden behind a tree for the next five days. Besides, Maura needed to go to the bathroom. Jane had made sure that they would take the longest drive from Boston: Mystic Seaport, Yale and a dozen of little towns that Maura didn't even know they existed. Yet they had got stuck in traffic as they had reached New York City.

It had taken them six hours in the end to reach St. George when a Boston-New York connection usually was a mere four-hour drive.

She was also starving. Jane had prevented her from having a snack around 3pm in spite of their numerous and so-called touristic stops because her aunt would try to force-feed them as soon as they would step out of the car.

"We could also..."

"Jane!"

"Alright, let's go."

Maura barely heard Jane's whisper. The moment her friend began to drive again, a dozen of people rushed out of a house on her left to literally surround the vehicle at light speed. Loudly. They were all screaming and waving at Jane whose smile had frozen into a terrible rictus of mental pain.

"What's going on? Are we late? You told them we were supposed to arrive today, didn't you?"

Jane stopped the car and glanced at her friend. She had to admit that Maura's current panic was delightful to witness. Hopefully one of her cousins was even filming the scene because the face Maura made was rather epic.

"Welcome to Staten Island, population: a thousand loud Rizzoli's." Jane opened the door and stepped out of the car. She opened her arms to a man in his mid-fifties. "Angelo!"

Maura timidly stepped out of the car as well. She held back a scream of surprise as something hard hit her side. She turned around and looked down. A rather short woman was standing by her side, and she was holding a tray full of antipasti.

Her dark eyes went from Maura's head to toe until she wrinkled her nose in obvious disapproval.

"Eat! Look at you, you're too skinny. Don't they feed you in Boston?" The woman picked up a couple of grissini. "Make Papito proud. Eat! Eat for Papito, Jane's girl friend!"

Papito?

"Jane..."

Maura frowned and tried to remember who Papito could be. The name didn't ring a bell but then Jane hadn't taught her about the nicknames. Feeling a bit lost, she rushed to the trunk of the car only to realize that people had already carried their suitcases inside the house. She swallowed hard.

"Who is Papito? The woman with the tray told me I needed to make Papito proud."

After hours of a strong anxiety, Jane now looked oddly relaxed. A peaceful smile curled up her lips as she stared at the aforesaid short woman.

"The woman with the tray is Eulalia though she seems to have stopped dying her hair... And Papito's my grandfather."

Grissini in her hand, Maura let a group of four people push her towards the house along with Jane. None of them was paying attention to her, it was the strangest situation she had ever experienced.

"I didn't know that your grandfather was still alive."

The door got slammed rather loudly in her back which made her jump. Three more steps in and she found herself in front of old, carpeted stairs. A joyful cacophony led her to a bedroom on the last floor and it is only once the door got closed again that a semblance of quietness fell back all around her.

Dizzy and extremely confused, Maura sat on the edge of the bed then began to stare at the grissini she was holding.

"Papito's dead. He passed away like fourteen years ago..." Jane poked her head in the bedroom, a hand on the door frame of the small ensuite bathroom. "My family's quite religious. The dead are never really forgotten... Nor dead. Though if you ask me, it's just another excuse to keep on eating."

Sweet.

The whirl of frenzy that had carried Maura till the bedroom had left her in a state of deep confusion. Disarmed, she took her stilettos off and jumped on top of the bed as something brushed her heel.

"Jane! There's something under this bed." What was going on, now? On her hands and knees on top of the mattress, Maura carefully bent over. She hadn't dreamed: something had really brushed her heel.  
"Jane..."

Jane casually walked out of the bathroom. She didn't look impressed. She squatted then looked under the bed before smiling at her friend almost apologetically.

"Yes, you're right, Maura." Jane reached under the bed. "And this thing is called Perla. C'mon, Perla."

A little girl who had to be around four-years old appeared in front of Maura as if by magic. She was holding one of Maura's stilettos very tightly against her chest.

"I like your shoes."

The unexpected remark made Maura burst out laughing. She ran a hand through her hair, relieved to find a logical explanation to a fact that had seemed to be mysterious at first, then brightly smiled at the little girl.

"Then it means you have excellent taste in shoes, Perla. You can be proud of you."

The sweetness of the interaction genuinely surprised Jane. Maura wasn't particularly at ease with children, even less when she didn't know them. But she now was showing excellent capacities of adaptation to a situation that was anything but familiar to her.

Jane went to grab Maura's shoe but Perla clutched to it and made a step backwards. Her traits become distorted under the weight of a sour anger. She was about to cry.

"It's okay, Jane." Maura motioned one of her suitcases that someone had carried to the bedroom. "I have other pairs I can wear."

Jane grabbed Perla by the shoulders and walked to the door. She opened it then squatted to be at eye-level with the little girl.

"Go tell your mom that we'll be downstairs in ten minutes."

Perla nodded and ran outside the bedroom with Maura's shoe in her hand.

"You have five minutes to have a shower and change, Maura. If we're not downstairs in ten minutes then they'll take it as one of the numerous dramas you'll face for the next five days." Jane crossed the bedroom and opened her suitcase. "This ten-minute break you get is because you're a guest or else you'd already be downstairs chatting with aunt Daria about her hysterectomy."

The springs of the bed loudly squealed the moment Maura jumped off the bed. She stretched her arms and walked on her tiptoes to her suitcase with a feline grace. Then she saw it, right in front of her.

"What's that?"

A quiet laugh rose in her back. She turned around to look at Jane and only then did Maura notice the old-fashioned decoration of the bedroom, from the pink carpeted floors to the tasteless wallpaper; the furniture that had probably got bought in the 60's.

"It's a statue of the Christ. What do you think it is?"

"But why is it... Blinking?" Of course, Maura had recognized the Christ. She wasn't completely deprived of religious knowledge. However, she had never seen such kind of conspicuous statue before.  
"It's... Singular."

Jane walked to her friend, a shirt in her hand. She observed the aforesaid statue for a while then let a disillusioned sigh pass her lips.

"Souvenir from Las Vegas, there's one in each bedroom. Remind me to unplug it tonight or else we'll never be able to fall asleep."

#### 4. Chapter 4

\*\*\_Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews (I still can't access the reviews. I can read them because I get alerts but then they don't appear here, I'm really sorry I can't reply to them yet).\_\*\*

\*\*Chapter Four:\*\*

Silence woke Jane up. Abruptly. She sat up in bed, breathless, and observed the bedroom. Maura was nowhere to be seen and the absence of loud voices was extremely unusual as well. Trying to ignore the fast beats of her heart, she got up and rushed to the window that overlooked the backyard.

The sun was shining high in a cloudless sky. Jane smiled: at least it wouldn't rain and they wouldn't be stuck inside.

Her dark eyes fixed upon the two figures that had squatted near Roberta's vegetable garden. Maura was in full talk with Lorena, one of Jane's aunts. She had dressed casually but in spite of her jeans and her plain blouse, a natural elegance exuded from Maura. She didn't belong there. She would never belong there in spite of her efforts to fit in.

Jane didn't lose a second. She grabbed a sweater and ran to the kitchen downstairs.

The dinner the evening before had gone as well as Jane could have hoped. Everyone had been nice to Maura and Jane had to admit that her relatives had remained as civilized as possible. Tired after such a long drive, she and Maura had gone to bed quite early. They had had a brief exchange, very neutral, before falling asleep.

"Good morning, ma'...." Jane walked to her mother and accepted with a smile the mug that her mother handed her. "Lorena's kidnapped Maura, I see."

Angela sat at the small kitchen table and glanced at nonna, the ninety-six-year-old woman who had become tight as a clam the day Papito had died.

"She's made a very good impression. I'm glad to see she easily interacts with everyone. Perla even gave her back her stiletto, this morning."

At what time had Maura woken up if she had seen Perla? Probably in the first hours. Guilt passed underneath Jane's olive skin. She had overslept and let her friend deal with a crowd of Italian-American strangers. It was wrong. The only person Maura knew was Angela but she didn't stay at Roberta's. Her presence in the kitchen was a simple coincidence due to the wedding preparations.

"Eulalia scared her yesterday with the antipasti though." Jane took a sip of coffee then went to lean against the door that led to the backyard. She observed Maura from there. "But then Eulalia scares the whole neighborhood since 1959. Where is she, by the way?"

"At the gym."

Jane didn't need more to choke on her coffee. She loudly coughed then turned around to stare at her mother as if she had just talked to her in a foreign language. Angela simply shrugged. She looked just as surprised as her daughter.

"She signed up for a zumba class three months ago and absolutely loves it."

The door of the backyard got opened. Maura came in, her hands in the pockets of her jeans. She flashed a bright smile at Jane then closed the door back as soon as Lorena followed her inside the kitchen.

"There you are, sleeping beauty!"

Maura felt the words slide on her lips, with all the things they implied, but didn't have a chance to hold them back in time. They hit

the air with a disastrous enthusiasm that caused her to heavily blush. Her remark was not appropriate for she barely knew anyone in the kitchen but Angela and Jane. She had sounded too familiar with her friend.

"Gina's working today, Jane. You and Maura should stop by the boutique to say hello." Roberta made a loud entrance in the kitchen and spoke to Jane as if she had always been in the room. "But we need the two of you here at 3pm. You'll help us choose the wedding picture frames." The woman walked to the fridge and took a full bowl of ricotta out of it. "Tomorrow you'll go get Isabella. This girl..." Roberta sighed then shook her head with frustration. She then turned to Angela. "Can you believe she hasn't come yet to congratulate her sister?"

Maura observed the scene as we attend an opera. The mention of Isabella piqued her curiosity and the bitter tone Roberta had used to talk about her even more. Maura didn't like trusting her instinct but she could easily say that something had happened between Gina and her sister. Was it what Jane called an umpteenth Rizzoli drama?

"Isabella has a demanding job, she works hard." Jane set her empty mug down in the sink. She briefly looked Maura in the eye before smiling at her apologetically. It's nothing. "But we'll go get her, yes..." She checked the time on her watch: it was already 11.30am. "Does this mean Maura and I can go have lunch in town?"

A loud sigh made everyone jump. Nonna had widened her gray eyes and was looking at Jane as if she had just cursed under one of the numerous statues of the Virgin Mary that seemed to look after each room of the small house.

"Why would you want to eat outside?" Marissa, Angela's sister-in-law walked into the kitchen with a couple of tupperware boxes. She rolled her eyes at Jane then dramatically raised her arms. "She wants to eat outside! Don't you like the food we have here?!"

Stuck in a corner of the kitchen, Maura didn't know what to do anymore. She had lost the plot while a thousand questions kept on rushing to her mind: yet all of them remained desperately unanswered. What was wrong about eating outside? Why so many women were suddenly standing in this kitchen without being invited to even enter the house? Where were the men? She hadn't seen any yet.

"It's the first time Maura comes to Staten Island so Janie wants to show her the area." A tactful smile played on Angela's lips as she winked at Maura. "Besides that's where Gina works."

"Oh. Of course!" Lorena suddenly seemed to remember Maura's existence. She trotted to her and cupped her face in her hands. "The girl friend!" She then looked at Jane. "Treat your girl friend, Janie. Then go to the Mall to say hi to Gina. She has your dress and you need to try it."

...

Maura had met Jane five years earlier and she could say that the two of them had gone through a lot within a short amount of time but she had never seen her friend as pissed as she now was. This was a first,

a terrible one.

Clutched to the steering-wheel, Jane kept on mumbling inaudible interjections. Her traits had deepened under the weight of her anger. Even her eyes looked darker.

"A fucking dress!"

The outburst caused Maura to jump on her seat. She had oddly got used to Jane's semi-silence during the first part of their drive to St. George waterfront. Thus hearing her friend's hoarse voice loudly burst in the car "so unexpectedly, besides" hurt her eardrums and made her wince in pain.

"I am not sure to understand why they have chosen a dress for you if you aren't a maid of honor... Is this an Italian tradition that I would have missed?"

The fairness of Maura's timid question had no soothing effect on Jane. She slowed down as she reached a stop sign and waited for a couple of seconds to reply to her friend. The last thing she wanted was to be rude to Maura for it would have been incredibly unfair. Jane still felt guilty for having overslept and let Maura deal alone with her relatives earlier in the morning. Snapping back would only make things worse.

"No, it's not. However pissing me off definitely is a Rizzoli tradition." Jane scoffed then honked at a vehicle that was going too slow for her own taste. "Look at the guys! Fabio, Enzo, Matteo... They do what they want. They're raised like kings and we, the women, are supposed to serve for the sake of some patriarchal bullshit. And because I had the unfortunate idea to be born with a uterus I'm now supposed to dress up as a stupid doll whenever someone gets married in the family!"

As they had retreated to their bedroom to get ready for a drive downtown, Maura had finally found out why the house had such a strong female presence during the day: only men were supposed to work. Jane's family was old-fashioned. Women became lovely housewives as soon as they tied the knot. Gina would stop working soon too even if she loved her job at the wedding dress boutique. When Maura had asked why the young woman had decided to quit, Jane had simply laughed then said that it was how it worked here.

"You shouldn't be mad because they want you to wear a dress. You're stunning, Jane... And a dress suits you. I'm sure that we'll find the right one for you."

"They won't let me choose it. I bet you \$50 that the one Roberta chose is some atrocious pink meringue thing that even a Disney princess wouldn't want to wear. The same pink as the bathroom tiles, Maura!"

Maura shivered at the thought. She hadn't overcome yet the questionable color of their ensuite bathroom. It didn't even match with the small painting of the Christ that hung above the old mirror next to the bidet.

She squeezed her friend's knee in an attempt to show her support and looked at the brick buildings out of the window on her right. St.

George looked liked to be a very quiet small town. Quite empty. She still had to see a passer-by.

"I won't let this happen. I promise you I won't let this happen."

Jane's dark eyes briefly fixed upon Maura's hand on her knee. Her friend's body heat had easily passed underneath the thin fabric of her jeans and had set off a confusing mechanism within Jane's head to the point that she now felt uncomfortable.

She understood the gesture. As a matter of fact, she even appreciated it. Maura simply tried to be supportive, to calm her down. Sadly what she saw as an innocent gesture got blown out of proportion for Jane and there was nothing innocent anymore.

Nothing at all.

"Thanks." Jane swallowed hard in an effort to enhance her concentration. "Thanks a lot."

## 5. Chapter 5

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for the reviews, the advices and the suggestions. I'm glad to see you're enjoying this story so far (and hopefully I'll be able to reply to your reviews one day).\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Five:\*\***

The backyard had turned into a joyful mess around 6pm when Roberta and her husband had decided to improvise a barbecue. The weather was particularly nice and the temperatures quite warm for the season. Yet in spite of the general cacophony, Maura could easily distinguish between the different social groups that formed her friend's family.

The oldest generation of men was in charge of the barbecue though it mostly seemed to involve drinking beer and laughing loudly. The wives were obviously in the kitchen. At this point, it didn't surprise Maura anymore: she had learned how this microcosm worked. The reasonably young women were sunbathing near the vegetable garden while their brothers were playing football on the opposite side of the backyard. As if in search of a place in the family, children were simply running from right to left then from left to right, wriggling between the different groups of relatives.

Of course, Jane was playing football with her cousins.

"Are you having fun?" Angela passed the door and walked to Maura. She was just the same as in Boston except in Staten Island, she seemed to be the calmest one. "How was your day? I know it's not the kind of place you're used to going to."

An ounce of apprehension rose in her voice as she looked Maura in the eye. The smile that played on her lips betrayed an uncertainty that went straight to Maura's heart. There was something touching in the way Angela and Jane tried to make sure that she would be okay.

"Oh, yes. I am!" Maura set her bottle of beer down on the hardwood floor of the porch. "The waterfront has a lot of charm and the boutique Gina works for is... Colorful."

The choice of adjective made Angela laugh lightly. Too often did Maura's politeness melt into a labyrinth of awkward diplomacy. But Maura was honest: she had enjoyed her time in St. George with Jane. They had had lunch at a small restaurant near the waterfront and Maura had finally been able to meet Gina who was a lovely young woman. They probably didn't have much in common but they had chatted together for a while and laughed when Jane had tried a cocktail dress.

"You don't want to go sunbathing with the girls?"

"Oh, no..." Maura shook her head. She pointed at her rather pale forearm. "I have a fair complexion, too fair for the sun. But it's okay, I'm fine, here."

Staying in the background, on the porch, was the source of peace that she needed after such a day. As much as Jane had warned her, Maura would have never imagined that being constantly surrounded by at least a dozen of people could be so exhausting. Under other circumstances, she would have gladly gone to lay down for a while but she didn't want to be impolite.

"By the way, Angela... How come everyone calls your late father Papito? It's a Spanish term."

The question was insignificant but it had crossed Maura's mind a couple of minutes earlier when she had heard Gina and Olivia mentioned their grandfather.

"Actually, it has nothing to do with Spanish. His name was Mariano and he used to work in the paper industry. Since he was quite short, his colleagues started calling him Papito then soon everyone took on it. Paper... Mariano... Papito. Got it? My mother's nonna, which is the Italian word for grandma."

"Look who's here!" A man in his thirties appeared on the porch, pushed by Lorena who was just as loud as usual. She waved to Angela before strategically positioning the young man in front of Maura. "It's Romeo... My son: the apple of my eye! And he's single. Come on, Angela. Leave the young ones alone."

The capacity Jane's aunts had to appear and disappear as if by magic was a complete mystery to Maura. Taken aback by the situation, she looked at Romeo blankly. Was Lorena trying to be a matchmaker, now?

Panic passed underneath Maura's pale skin. She glanced at Jane, asking in silence for some help. Sadly her friend was focused on the football game. Fine: she would have to deal with this on her own.

"Nice to meet you, Romeo. I'm Maura, Maura Isles... Jane's friend."

With his slicked dark hair and his impeccable suit, Romeo looked like the stereotype of an Italian mafioso. The comparison caused Maura to

held back a laugh. She wasn't in a remake of The Soprano's. Some of the older men were intimidating though. She had to admit it.

"Bella Maura..." Romeo didn't have time to add anything else as the football hit him hard on the head. "Ouch!"

This was anything but an accident. Maura had been sitting on the porch for over twenty minutes and at no moment had she ever been threatened by a loss ball. She turned her head only to see Jane run towards her.

"Romeo." The sharpness of her tone of voice matched the cold anger in her eyes. She grabbed the football back then made one more step towards Maura. "Where's your girlfriend, Veronica?"

"She's with her nonna." In spite of a stubborn attempt to look casual, Romeo had lost the self-confidence he had just showed.

"Bringin' the girl friend to the wedding, Jane?" A smile devoid of any feeling played on his lips as he looked at Maura. "I'll go get a beer. Nice to meet you, Maura."

Maura nodded back but remained quiet. She made some room for Jane to sit down next to her then picked up a bottle of beer from the ice box someone had put on the porch. She handed it to her friend.

"His Juliet is a Veronica?"

Jane sent the beer cap flying. Maura's reference to Shakespeare didn't have the expected effect and her lips remained desperately pursed as she followed Romeo with her eyes.

"His Juliet is pretty much anything that moves... With his mother's blessing of course. Lorena has six daughters and one son only so he's her little prince." She took a sip of beer. "And he loves it. Watch out. He's worse than Giovanni."

...

Jesus had stopped blinking. He was back to his quiet darkness for the night just as Maura had settled in bed to sleep. She stared at the statue absentmindedly, focused on the discreet noises that came from the bathroom: the water running in the sink, the stifled steps on the plastic floor.

Her very first full day in Staten Island had been outlandish. She had spent three hours at a cheap boutique trying to convince Jane that she looked good in a terrible dress, a pink one besides. Then she had given her opinion about a Colyseum background worth a thousand Hollywood fake sets that the future bride and groom would use for their official wedding pictures. By the time the barbecue had started, Maura had succumbed to daydreams that would hopefully take her far away from such madness.

She had never understood Jane so well.

"You must be happy." Jane walked out of the bathroom after turning its light off. "We're going to Manhattan tomorrow."

The joy Maura could have felt got immediately swept away by her confusion. Jane had told her the day before that the closest they

would get to Manhattan was if they happened to order the cocktail of the same name at a bar. What had happened that their plans had suddenly changed? She must have missed something somewhere.

"How come?"

Jane settled on her side of the bed and stretched her arms above her head. Even at 11pm the house wasn't quiet. They could hear the television from there. Her uncle was watching a game show.

"We gotta convince Isabella to come back here with us, remember? She lives in Manhattan, in The Upper East Side."

The mention of the wealthy neighborhood shamefully released a surge of adrenalin in Maura's veins. She was finally going to hang around a place that she knew, a place that looked like her. It would only be for a few hours but she saw it as a real opportunity to overcome the delicacy of the foreign environment she was currently in.

"So all your cousins don't live in Staten Island. You lied to me." An amused smile curled up her lips as a mischievous flicker lit up her hazel eyes. She rolled on her side to look at her friend. "How come she lives in Manhattan?"

"She's an attorney. Isabella... Isabella isn't like the others. She went to college, to an Ivy League as a matter of fact. She went to Harvard. She rejected the social environment she was born in very early on. That's why my family has a hard time dealing with her. They think she feels superior to them."

"Does she?"

Jane shook her head and positioned herself exactly like Maura. Thus she could look at her friend more easily and create an intimate atmosphere for a late night chat.

"No! But that's how they see it. They don't get it that you don't wanna be like them. It's like a betrayal for them. You'd have seen how they reacted when I made it to the Academy. Roberta's sure that Isabella's ashamed of her roots."

Maura remembered the picture of Isabella that Jane had chosen to illustrate the homemade family tree. Nothing relevant about it had caught her attention nor let her assume that Isabella didn't really fit in. Yet her curiosity was now piqued.

"Do you like her more than the others? I mean, do you feel closer to her?"

The question raised uncertainty in Jane's mind. She could hardly reply to Maura for she didn't know if what she felt towards her cousin was empathy or an ounce of an unexplain and appealing mystery.

Isabella wasn't like the others but Jane wasn't necessarily closer to her nonetheless.

"There's something intimidating about her so I'm not sure, to be honest... But you'll probably love her. She's a socialite just like you."

## 6. Chapter 6

\_\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and suggestions, I'm glad to also be able to finally answer them.  
\*\*\_

### \*\*Chapter Six:\*\*

Maura ran outside the small passenger room and went to lean against the guardrail of the ferry deck. She was glowing, at the mercy of a ribbon of laugh that lit up her features with an incontestable grace. A gust of wind caused her to hold her hat tightly on top of her head but at no moment did it reduce to pieces her bright mood. She was happy, so happy. Like a child in front of a Christmas tree.

"Won't you come to admire the view?"

Jane had remained close to the door and had leaned against the frame. Her hands in the pockets of her jeans, she was watching her friend from a reasonable distance. Her quietness contrasted with Maura's excitement; deeply, mysteriously. She wasn't ecstatic. It was just another ferry ride, after all.

"Sure." Even if she didn't seem to be very convinced by the idea, Jane nonetheless walked to Maura and focused on the Manhattan skyline that appeared in the distance embraced by a glorious sun. "There we go."

Maura nodded before raising her head slightly. Her gesture highlighted a sentiment of pride that she had a hard time to control.

"It's the first time I take the ferry to Manhattan... Can you believe it? It's meaningful. Think about all these immigrants who used to arrive by boat. This was the first view they had of America."

Jane let the words sink in. Of course she had thought exactly the same the first time she had got on board the ferry but the monotony of journeys that end up melting into habits prevented her from sharing Maura's current joy. Besides, the upcoming visit to Isabella made her feel nervous. If she didn't convince her cousin to go back to Staten Island with them then she would be held responsible.

At least it had the credits to give her an excellent excuse to run away from the frenzy of the wedding preparations and her intrusive family for a while.

She positioned herself next to Maura and leaned against the guardrail to look down at the deep waters. The seagulls were dancing in the sky, singing a singular melody to her ears while the sun warmed up her nape. Everything would have been so different under other circumstances: the colors of the day, the presence of her friend by her side and the way her heart responded to it with a loud quietness.

"Look!" Maura suddenly pressed her friend's hand tightly as she pointed The Statue of Liberty with her other hand. "Oh, we'll have to

visit it." The smile she flashed Jane matched the mischievous flicker that lit up her hazel eyes. "Please..."

She didn't release Jane's hand immediately. She waited for a reaction instead and only pressed it even more tightly as soon as Jane's laugh twirled in the ocean breeze.

Jane was in a better mood today and it made Maura happy. Going to Manhattan for the day carried weight in her attitude which immensely relieved Maura. The constant tension she had felt since the day they had arrived to Staten Island was emotionally hard to handle. Thus she embraced the opportunity to leave St. George for a few hours with an obvious joy.

They wouldn't have to deal with Roberta, Lorena, Gina, Paolo, Romeo and the dozen of other relatives before dinner time and it was barely 11am now.

"Isn't Isabella working, today? She might not be at home if she's snowed under work."

"She knows we're coming, Roberta called her this morning. She works from home from time to time, it's not a problem for her."

Maura noticed the apprehension in Jane's voice but she didn't dare to ask for further details. The rather loud silence over the young attorney spoke for itself but there was nothing more impolite than to allude to such awkwardness when you were nothing but a mere guest.

"It's perfect, then."

The ferry ride lasted its usual twenty-five minutes. Maura would have enjoyed a walk first but Jane made sure that they would hail a taxi in order to head straight to her cousin's place in the Upper East Side. The avenues passed before their eyes, a brick building after another, until the car stopped in front of a luxurious skyscraper.

Maura barely hid her surprise: they couldn't be any further than the Staten Island middle-class houses the rest of the family had.

She didn't understand why Jane had never told her about Isabella nor about her social ascension. For Maura, Jane's family belonged to the American middle-class yet the building she had just walked in belonged to another world; one that she knew quite well herself.

They went in the elevator and let the lobby boy press the right button .

"The last floor? She owns a penthouse?" Surprise rose within Maura's voice as her eyes fixed upon her friend with perplexity. Isabella must be a really successful attorney to be able to afford a penthouse in the Upper East Side at such relatively young age. A few seconds passed by. "The view must be gorgeous."

"It is, thank you."

The foreign voice caused Maura to look up. She hadn't heard the doors

of the elevator open. As a matter of fact, she hadn't even felt the moment the elevator had stopped.

A woman in her late thirties was standing by the doors. She was wearing a Chanel dress, a black one. The muslin of the piece of clothing peacefully danced around her bare feet. She smiled at Maura and held out her hand.

"I'm Isabella, nice to meet you. Please come in." Isabella pointed out the large living-room that directly gave on the elevator. "It's good to see you, Jane. How are you?"

Maura noticed that Isabella had the same hoarse voice as her friend, only somewhat deeper. She was probably a smoker. Her low bun extricated a graceful nape. As she led them into the sunny living-room, her large golden earrings caught the rays of the sun and shone with a singular elegance.

"Would you like to drink something?" Isabella squinted her eyes as she observed Maura. Her lips curled up in a playful smirk. "What's your poison?"

Isabella was a seductress and Maura had to admit that she loved it.

"A Martini." At ease, Maura walked to the large French windows that had remained opened to make sure that the hot temperatures would warm the main room. The terrace was quite big too. Maura noticed an outside stair on her left. "Oh, it's a duplex?"

Isabella nodded from the bar where she was preparing their cocktails. She glanced at Jane who had remained silent but who had finally sat down on one of the modern couches then winked at Maura.

"My study and the bedroom are upstairs. The top-floor terrace is smaller but this is where we have the hot tub. You can go and check, if you want."

We? Maura didn't miss the use of the pronoun. Nobody had mentioned the fact that Isabella could live with someone. That was even the reason why Maura had assumed that Jane's cousin was too focused on her career to have a love life.

Obviously she had been wrong.

"Maybe later, thank you."

Maura's timid answer made Isabella loudly burst out laughing and for a brief second her Italian roots showed a lot more than what she allowed herself to usually show. She brought Jane her drink then walked to Maura with two Martinis.

"Come with me, I'll show you." She turned around to look at Jane. "Do you want to come with us?"

"Nah, I'll stay here with Lucifer." Jane pointed a black cat that was now making its way to her. It jumped on her lap and settled there. "His my New York pal..."

"His name isn't Lucifer but Dante, Jane."

Jane shrugged, very matter-of-factly, and began to caress the cat. She likes his purring, it was very relaxing and exactly what she now needed.

"That's still linked to Hell!"

Isabella discreetly pushed Maura's elbow towards the terrace. They immediately went upstairs to admire the view. The quietness of the place sharply contrasted with their current location.

They were right in the heart of Manhattan, after all. Central Park was opposite the avenue. Maura had a full view over the ribbon of green that lay there. As a matter of fact, she had a full view over the whole borough from the Empire State Building to the Dakota Building.

The upfloor terrace was a tad smaller, just as Isabella had said, but its surface was important enough to fit a large hot tub and four deckchairs along with various small trees and plants.

"It's gorgeous. Have you been living here for a long time?"

Isabella took a sip of her cocktail with a self-control that impressed Maura a lot. She now understood why Jane found her intimidating. Isabella was in perfect control of everything, all the time, which unintentionally gave the sentiment she was a cold woman.

"It's been five years now. I used to live on the Upper West Side but then I had the opportunity to invest in this penthouse. Carmen had just had a promotion at work so we jumped on the occasion."

Maura's lips had just brushed the edge of her glass when Isabella mentioned Carmen. Confused, Maura frowned and tried to remember if there was any Carmen in Jane's family tree though from what she knew about Isabella, it seemed a tad off. If the attorney had taken her distance from her family then chances were that she hadn't bought this apartment with the help of a relative.

"Carmen?"

There was nothing polite in Maura's question and she knew it but her curiosity had reached such level that she had had to ask. Thankfully Isabella didn't seem to take it badly. A delicate smile played on her lips as she nodded to what was probably an evidence to her.

"My wife."

## 7. Chapter 7

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews, as I'm a bit in a hurry today I will reply to each of them tonight.\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Seven:\*\***

"I won't marry him! I can't!" Gina sobbed. "The wedding's cancelled!"

Gina's outburst caused Jane, Maura and Isabella to abruptly stop in the lobby. The words were still floating in the air when Gina dramatically passed in front of them before rushing upstairs. She didn't even notice their presence.

A door got slammed and, against all expectations, life resumed just as loudly as it had to.

"Gina..." Roberta trotted outside the kitchen then stopped when she noticed the group of three that had just returned to Staten Island. She shook her head, her traits distorted by an immense pain. "Her mascarpone isn't very good."

Maura wasn't in a mischievous mood but she nonetheless wondered if Roberta had used a secret code to talk to them. The men were in the living-room watching television, after all. There were some things they may not be allowed to overhear.

Or else Jane's aunt's remark was very confusing.

"Oh." Isabella handed a bottle of Chianti to her mother then apologetically smiled at Maura. "Here's another Rizzoli superstition: if you fail at baking a tiramisu a few days before your wedding then it's a bad omen for your marriage."

Roberta nodded as if she needed to confirm what her daughter had just said. Her lips barely brushed Isabella's cheek in a semblance of a kiss. The illusion didn't fool anyone. The cold gesture even took Maura aback. It had nothing to do with the usual effusion of sentiments that Jane's relatives showed. The discomfort was palpable and weighed just as much as all the unsaid things that darkened Isabella's background story.

"Oh, no! But does this mean the wedding is cancelled?"

"No..." Isabella motioned the stairs that Rosetta and Giulia had just taken. "We'll now make sure to reassure her. Can you really play your whole life on the quality of a cake?"

Maura didn't dare to shake her head for she didn't want to hurt Roberta's feelings. She was her host, after all. She couldn't confront her to what she, Maura, saw as questionable antics.

"Carmen didn't come?"

It wasn't a question but an affirmation, one that betrayed a latent sadness. Jane and Maura stared at Roberta in silence but Angela's sister didn't add anything else. She quietly turned on her heels then walked back to the kitchen.

"We eat at Lorena's tonight."

The blankness of her voice kept on haunting Maura long hours after her comeback to St. George. She had unintentionally learned many things within a day. They all made sense and yet remained desperately blurry at the same time. She hadn't been able to ask Jane further details about Isabella's married status for they hadn't had a second for themselves yet.

Was it because Isabella was married to a woman that her family had taken their distance from her? Yet Roberta's lament had been cleared: she had hoped for Carmen to spend the evening with her, thus she couldn't be against the idea of her daughter being in a same-sex relationship.

"Jane!"

Angela called her daughter. Jane sighed, exasperated, then excused herself before leaving Maura and Isabella alone. This was not the return she had hoped yet it was the return she had imagined.

"Did your pre-wedding mascarpone turn out to be a success?"

The question honestly surprised Isabella. Her eyes widened with a discretion that betrayed years of practice. She glanced at the kitchen door. A smirk played on her lips.

"Of course, it did. I know an excellent Italian trattoria in Manhattan."

...

"Go watch television, Maura! You haven't watched television yet!"

Lorena's loud voice took Maura out of her daydreams. A glass of wine in her hand, Maura felt two hands on her shoulders and an impressive strength pushing her towards the living-room.

The words didn't come out, even after she opened her mouth to speak. She quickly found herself in a rather large room, surrounded by men, before she even had a chance to realize what was happening.

"Come sit with us, Maura."

Amadeo, Francesco's twin brother, motioned an armchair that was still available. Politeness pushed Maura to smile and she accepted the seat even though she would have preferred to remain in the kitchen with the female clan of the family.

"What... What are you watching?"

"Television."

If Maura wasn't a very talkative person then she had to admit that Guido was even worse than her. She blushed, suddenly wondering if her question had troubled the quietness of the living-room.

She had only tried to make conversation though.

"Look at this." Antonio, one of Jane's uncles, missed hitting Maura with his arm by an inch as he tried to show her his injury. "Do you think I should go to the hospital? It's making my wife, Maria, mad."

"Everything makes Maria mad, Toni."

Amadeo's remark made the group of men burst out laughing. Their hoarse voices resonated loudly in the living-room. Too intimidated,

Maura didn't join in. She focused instead on the injury Jane's uncle had sustained. At least she now had a reason to speak.

"What happened to you, Antonio?"

"I went for an extra-slice of pie but my wife threatened me with a kitchen knife because the doctor said I had to slow down on sugar."

Maura swallowed hard. Her hazel eyes slowly went up from the man's injury to his own eyes. Italian women had quite a lot of temper but she surely hoped that they weren't prone to domestic violence either. Antonio burst out laughing.

"It's a joke! I cut myself at work."

Oh. Was this Italian-American humor? Maura felt bad for she had barely got used to Jane's sarcasm after years of terrible misunderstandings. She wasn't quite ready to add Italian sense of humor to her list of incomprehensible people's remarks.

"It is a superficial scar, you should do just fine. It doesn't require stitches. However, make sure to apply sunscreen whenever you go out for a while."

Antonio's blue eyes disappeared behind thick eyelashes as he squinted his eyes to observe his bad cut. He then finally nodded.

"You're a good doctor. It's good to have a doctor in the family. I'm sure you make your patients happy."

"She's a medical examiner, Antonio." Lorena walked inside the living-room. She set a tray full of antipasti down on the coffee table. "She cuts dead people open. That's her job."

Maura had faced many awkward situations in the past when she had had to explain the exact nature of her job but at no moment had she been just as blunt as Lorena. Mortified, she gulped down her wine then rushed to the kitchen for a refill.

Jane's uncles would now think that she was the female version of Dr. Frankenstein: it was embarrassing; no matter how much she had loved the novel.

"May I help you?"

Jane seemed to have embraced her housewife role with a surprising eagerness. She glanced at Maura but remained concentrated on her pasta dough preparation nonetheless. Maura's whisper was full of timidity. It was sweet.

"Fancy a little walk?"

...

The neighborhood consisted of wooden suburban houses and endless roads of grey concretes but going out for a while to escape the frenzy of Lorena's home had seemed like a good idea at first. Yet Maura hadn't imagined that Jane's walk would turn out to be so challenging.

"What is that?!"

Maura's question made Jane laugh. Their day had been rather stress inducing and she, Jane, was glad to be able to enjoy a short moment of peace along with Maura. She tightened her grip on the leash. The effort was such that her veins showed through her skin.

"That... Is Allegra: a very energetic four-year-old Australian Shepherd."

Energetic was an understatement. Maura held back a laugh: she and Jane had been running after the dog for the last ten minutes. She hadn't even been able to check the area at all. She caught glimpses of houses from time to time but what she had mostly seen so far was the asphalt of the sidewalks.

"And then you complain about Bass! At least he doesn't force us to run a marathon through the streets of Boston on a Wednesday at 6pm."

Talking about Allegra was a subterfuge but the profusion of unanswered questions Maura had about Isabella remained in a corner of her mind, far from what politeness allowed her to actually ask. The timing was wrong and Maura could say that the subject made Jane feel uncomfortable.

One day, perhaps.

"Where are we going to, exactly? Do you even know where we are?"

Jane managed to slow down the dog's pace which gave her some time to check the street signs. Sadly she didn't know the neighborhood very well and none of the names rang a bell. She ran a hand through her hair and tried to catch her breath.

"Yeah... We're in St. George." Her lips curled up in a smile that she hoped funny enough. "Don't worry, we have Google Map."

If it weren't for Allegra, Jane would have gladly taken advantage of their sudden freedom to spend the evening at one of the waterfront bars. A dinner at Lorena's was the kind of nightmare she didn't wish anyone, even her worst enemy. It was a lot worse than staying at Roberta's.

Even more now that Isabella was there.

"Okay. Then let's walk." Maura passed her arm under her friend's and immediately felt a wave of warmth spread within herself. She took a deep breath in an attempt to enjoy even more deeply the satisfaction that had emanated from the gesture. "Let's Allegra lead us to... Wherever she wants to go. All roads lead to Rome, no?"

The Italian reference caused Jane's dark eyes to glimmer with delight.

"Or at least to Aunt Lorena's."

## 8. Chapter 8

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and messages, it's really nice of you.\*\*

\*\*Part Two "I sentimenti"\*\*

\*\*Chapter Eight\*\*

Maura woke up to a delicate heat, the one that comes along with sunny summer days and a cloudless sky. She remained still for long seconds, enjoying the softness of the mattress against her back and her legs. Someone had pushed away the bedsheet during the night, either Jane or her. She couldn't tell for she didn't really remember. Yet the sheet were now at the foot of the bed revealing thus the mattress.

Stifled voices reached her ears by waves. Many people were probably already up. Jane's relatives were early birds. They all got up in the first hours of the morning with an energy that remained foreign to Jane's world. Maura had to admit that it took her aback as well.

Tired of the ceiling contemplation, Maura slowly turned her head. Her eyes fixed upon the window on her left. The sun was piercing through the shutters, its rays sliding on the carpeted floor until the foot of the bed. What time could it be? With a lot of care, Maura picked up her cell phone on the bedside table: 8.30am.

After long seconds of indecisiveness, Maura quietly rolled on her side to look at Jane. Her friend was still asleep, huddled up. She was turning her back at Maura.

If she hadn't moved her arm at this exact moment then Maura would have never felt the roughness of the tip against her skin. A feather poked out of her pillow. Amused, she grabbed it then leaned up on her elbow to come closer to Jane. She was only a couple of inches away from her friend's face, ready to caress her cheek with the feather, when a loud and joyful exclamation just behind the door made her jump.

Everything went very fast: Maura lost her balance and landed in Jane's arms who immediately woke up to the unexpected weight on her. Neither of them had time to realize what had just happened. The door flew open. Isabella remained on the threshold. She looked taken aback by the scene. Who would blame her though? She had just walked in on Maura wearing nothing but a negligee, in Jane's arms, while Jane only had a shirt and hipsters on.

"Oh. I'm sorry." Isabella went to close back the door but neither Jane nor Maura missed her whispered remark. "Small wonder why it didn't work with this idiot of Romeo."

The clicking of the door getting closed plunged Jane and Maura in a state of near panic. Maura immediately rolled back on her side of the bed as Jane sat up and burried her face in her hands.

"No, no, no, no, no..."

"We didn't do anything, it's okay." Maura's tone of voice was shaking too much to even sound convincing. "Besides, it's Isabella."

The extra-remark caused Jane to growl. She slowly turned her head before looking Maura in the eye. This wasn't how she had imagined to start the day.

"And so what? Just because she's married to a woman doesn't mean that she'll stay quiet over..." Jane furiously motioned the bed. "Over all this!"

Maura looked down at her lap as guilt invaded her. It was her fault. If she hadn't leaned over a sleeping Jane to wake her up with the feather then none of this would have happened.

The brief but burning seconds during which she had stared at Jane's lips while she had leaned over her vanished in the distance, swept away by a thousand untold regrets. She got up but soon realized that she didn't know what to do. Many things didn't make sense right now, from the desire she had had to kiss Jane to the way her friend was now mortified.

"Do you think she's going to tell everyone about it? Really?" Maura ran a hand through her hair. Her heart was beating fast which made her feel dizzy. "But it was an accident!"

Jane got up and walked to her travel bag. She hadn't bothered unpacking as she simply took a new shirt out of it every day. Her clothes were rather basic anyway, nothing required any kind of maintenance unlike Maura's. She shrugged, not really knowing what to say back.

She wasn't mad at Maura. She knew how clumsy her friend could be at times. As a matter of fact, it was nobody's fault though Isabella should have knocked on the door before walking inside the bedroom. She had lacked respect towards the two of them.

Sixteen hours at her parents' place and Isabella had already adopted back the good old traditions of Rizzoli's: nobody deserved privacy.

"Nah, it's just... Embarrassing." The choice of word hurt Jane a lot more than what she would ever dare to admit it. The last thing she wanted was Maura to think that she, Jane, was ashamed of their strong friendship. "Francesco doesn't even want to hear about Carmen so she'll never tell him anything. He still says Carmen is a friend when asked about it."

The allusion to Isabella's wife surprised Maura quite a bit. She hadn't dared to talk about Carmen the day before but Jane now blurted it out with a casualness that made her doubt. Maura bit her lower lip: if only the situation weren't as tense as it now was then perhaps she would be able to have a few of her questions answered.

Sadly she knew that it wouldn't happen now.

"Roberta seems okay with it though."

"Roberta makes do." Jane picked up a pair of jeans then motioned the statue of Jesus. "I'm gonna have a shower. Would you mind plugging it back?"

Maura did. She leaned against the wall, crossed her arms against her chest then observed the blinking statue for long minutes. She hadn't managed to make up her mind: was it tacky or just atrocious? The only thing she knew for sure was that the Pope would probably not approve. She had gone to the Vatican several times already as a tourist and the Church much preferred sobriety to something so flashy.

Not knowing what to do yet not particularly eager to face Jane's relatives alone, she went back to the bed and picked up her phone anew. She dialed a number and waited for her mother to take the call.

The reason why she had decided to call her in the first place remained blurry but she suddenly felt the urge to hear her mother's voice on the other end of the line. Constance's unique tone of voice would be comforting and it was exactly what Maura needed right now.

...

"So tonight we have Gina's pre-rehearsal dinner. Are you excited about it?"

Maura carefully set her cup of coffee down on the table and smiled at Roberta. Her smile didn't reach her eyes though. She still had in mind the incident of the morning and it kept on dragging her down. It was her fault, everything was her fault.

"Oh, very much. It will be my first pre-rehearsal dinner, as a matter of fact."

Which was quite logical since pre-rehearsal dinners weren't even supposed to exist. Whatever. Maura had simply decided to embrace Jane's family traditions fully. Roberta's eyes widened with excitement. She clapped her hands and squealed with delight.

"You're going to love it!"

"Will Carmen be here?" Maura desperately tried to keep on making eye-contact with Jane's aunt in spite of her impudence. She shouldn't have asked such question even if it had burnt her lips for too long now. At least she had showed casualness. "I mean..."

Roberta cast a glance at the kitchen door to make sure that nobody would walk in on them. Angela, Jane and Isabella were in the dining-room working on a photo-montage for Gina. Apart from the silent nonna, the kitchen was empty and nonna would never make any remark.

Maura had learned to enjoy the first hours of the afternoon in Staten Island for it was when the house was more or less quiet. It would change soon though as more relatives would arrive, starting with Frankie and Tommy.

She was glad to know Jane's brothers would attend the wedding. Thus she would feel a bit less lonely among a crowd of loud and foreign Italian cousins.

"She's invited but I don't know if she'll come. I would like to

though." Doubts darkened Roberta's traits for a brief second as she pondered something. "Are you like Isabella?"

Maura frowned. Jane's aunt's question was vague and terribly precise at the same time. Yet there was nothing harder than being honest right now. Had Isabella told her mother about the morning incident? Unless there was something else? What if it lie within their attitudes, subconsciously? Maura bit her lips, suddenly at the mercy of doubts.

"Jane and I aren't..."

Roberta raised her index finger to force Maura to stop talking. A peaceful smile made her eyes glimmer. She nodded then went for a coffee refill.

"I know that but it's not my question. Are you like my daughter? You know... Do you prefer... Do you prefer women?"

There was no resentment in Roberta's voice, not even an ounce of unhealthy curiosity. She was simply asking Maura a question the same way she would have asked anyone whether it was raining outside. The kindness of her smile reassured Maura. It spread a wave of warmth over her heart.

"I don't have any preference." She had never said it to Angela, even less to Jane. Only a few people knew and yet she had just admitted it to someone she had met three days earlier. Confused by her unexpected boldness, she laughed quietly then decided to be completely honest. "I prefer Jane though."

Roberta raised an eyebrow at the same time as she smirked. Warmly, kindly.

"Oh, I know that. I can see it with my own eyes. And you know what? I think Jane prefers you too but she's too coward to admit it."

...

\*\*I sentimenti: the feelings\*\*

## 9. Chapter 9

\*\*Author's note: Thank you for all your reviews and messages.\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Nine\*\***

It was a permanent feature since Maura was in Staten Island: she found herself somewhere and had no idea why she was there in the first place. At least this time, she had the occasion to visit a place that only Italian locals used to frequent. St. George waterfront was nice but it looked very impersonal compared to the cafe Roberta had taken her to.

"Aren't we supposed to go to the grocery store?"

It was the excuse Roberta had used when she had asked Maura to come

along with her. Of course, she had made sure to wait and not have Jane around or else this face-to-face would have never happened for Jane was constantly with Maura. Too polite to decline, Maura had soon found herself at a small Italian cafe downtown.

"I only have a couple of things to buy. We'll go later... Francesco thinks I'm a slow shopper. Little does he know it's just I like having a drink before!"

The remark made Maura laugh lightly. If she found Jane's family's scheme quite archaic, she had to admit that the women had simply come up with subterfuges to turn their monotone routines into something pleasant. Perhaps Francesco even knew about Roberta's trick but he simply turned a blind eye to it because it made his wife happy.

There were a lot of untold things in their daily lives. Some were just a lot sweeter than other ones, harmless as well.

"And it's always a Campari?" Maura raised her glass. She smiled at Jane's aunt then took a sip of the Italian liquor. It was early in the afternoon for such a drink but since Roberta had ordered one then Maura had decided to follow her. "What a nice idea! You would get along with my mother."

"Why? She likes Campari too?"

Maura smiled as the first image that came to mind turned out to be one of Constance with a glass of Cognac in her hand. She looked at her drink then nodded.

"Oh, she likes all sorts of drinks."

Maura really dreaded the moment Roberta would talk about the reason that had pushed her to suggest this last-minute getaway. Maura wasn't a fool: she knew that it had to do with the confession she had made earlier in the kitchen, about the feelings she had for Jane. She simply hoped that Roberta wouldn't try to play the matchmaker for it would make her feel uncomfortable. The situation was complex, a lot more than what Roberta would ever be able to understand. After the fiasco with Romeo, Maura feared that Jane's aunt didn't have the subtlety it required. Lorena wasn't much different.

"You should take Jane here tonight, after the pre-rehearsal dinner. It's karaoke night on Thursday!"

Maura's lips curled up in a smile. It was very nice of Roberta, however Maura knew that Jane disliked karaoke with a passion. As a matter of fact, Maura herself wasn't very fond of it. She couldn't even hold a tune. The last thing she wanted was to die of shame in Staten Island.

"How does the pre-rehearsal dinner work? I mean, should I know something about it? Traditions, music..."

The change of subject was a bit abrupt but Maura hadn't found any other way to let Roberta understand that she didn't want to talk about her feelings again. Besides, there was nothing to add: her heart beat faster whenever Jane was around and she knew why. It was a fact. It was a reality that she had accepted a long time ago just

like the silence that surrounded it.

"No, it's a very informal dinner. It's held at Fabio's because he has the biggest backyard of us all. It's the occasion to invite over the family-in-law too."

"Oh, I see."

Not really knowing what to say, Maura fixed her hazel eyes upon her glass of Campari. She had already drunk most of the *apéritif* and now felt a bit dizzy. Perhaps she should slow down a bit.

"I wish Carmen were here."

Roberta's words pierced the air with the sharpness of a Samurai sword. She had murmured her confession but with such a strength that Maura felt Jane's aunt's bitterness tighten her own heart.

"Can't she come?"

Roberta shrugged as a thin smile barely reached her lips. Then Maura understood that her host hadn't asked her to go out with her to talk about Jane but to talk about Isabella, probably because she didn't have anyone else to share her thoughts on the matter with.

"I've invited her, of course. But my husband..." Roberta shook her head. "He's never accepted it. We always knew she was different: as a child, then as a teenager. At first we thought she was just timid and that's why she didn't talk about... Boys unlike her sisters but then... She decided to go to college. She was a bright student, always plunged in her books. She had dreams. I think... I think we were just in denial. The day she told us that she lived with a woman, it turned out to be a shock but it shouldn't have been. We just had refused to see the signs."

A torrent of words were sliding on Roberta's lips. It was as if she had opened the doors to something that she had kept for herself for too long, a river of repressed emotions and confusion. The more she spoke, the lighter her traits became. She wasn't somber at all, just full of regrets.

"Jane is different."

Maura never quite understood why she suddenly blurted it out. She had felt the urge to defend her friend, to let Roberta know that Jane and Isabella weren't alike. Somewhat embarrassed, she focused on the small wooden table and plunged into a shameful world of silence.

"Oh, I know. Jane is... She's probably like you, more or less. Somewhere in between. She had boyfriends and had boy crushes when she was a teen. Ask her about Leonardo!" Roberta burst out laughing as the reminiscence of what must have been a summer fling. "She's not like Isabella... But Isabella probably reminds her of a part of her identity that she has a hard time to deal with."

Maura closed her eyes. The cafe briefly disappeared as she filled her lungs with air and let a smile light up her traits. Roberta's perceptive mind had taken her aback. She had been wrong about Jane's aunt: Roberta wasn't just a loud, middle-class housewife who hadn't

got any college education. She was a bright person and her judgement was spot-on.

"Sadly, I don't think Jane will ever accept it."

Roberta gulped down her Campari. She set the empty glass down on the table then looked Maura in the eye with the same self-confidence as Isabella's. Maura came to the conclusion that both women had a lot more in common than what they would ever be eager to admit.

"She will if you make the first step, \_amore\*\_!"

...

"Of course she lied to you! She's Italian!" A black dress hanging on her forearm, Jane raised an index finger and looked at Maura. "Rule number one with Italians: when they say it's a casual dinner then make sure to dress up to the nine."

Maura sat on the bed and let an unpleasant wave of confusion rush through her. She had come back from her so-called grocery shopping getaway to find Jane on the verge of an umpteenth nervous breakdown for she had forgotten in Boston the only black dress she more or less liked. Thankfully Isabella had lent her one. Nobody attended a pre-rehearsal dinner in jeans.

She wasn't very fond of her family but she didn't want to be disowned either.

"Then how come Roberta is so calm?"

Maura's question caused Jane to snort. She rushed to the bathroom just as much to change her clothes and do her hair as to run away from Maura. Panic had overwhelmed her the moment she had learned that Roberta and Maura had left without her. She knew her aunt and what she was capable of: Maura had fallen into a terrible Italian trap and Jane would feel guilty for the rest of her life. She was responsible of Maura's well-being in Staten Island and it certainly didn't include grocery shopping with a loud Italian woman.

"She knows the in-laws, she basically grew up with them." Jane's dark eyes fixed upon her reflection in the small bathroom mirror. She felt the words caress her lips then wrap up her body with a burning sensation that forced her to speak. "What did the two of you do, anyway? I'm sorry she pushed you to go to the grocery store with her."

Maura was mentally debating the choice of her evening dress when Jane's question made her freeze. She swallowed hard and desperately looked for something relevant to say back. Of course she couldn't let her friend know that she, Maura, had talked about her feelings for her with her aunt. Yet the mention of Isabella had chances to make Jane feel awkward too.

A sigh of frustration passed Maura's lips as she realized that she was in a dead-end path.

"We just went out for a little while... Don't be worried, Jane. It was nice. I enjoyed it quite a lot, as a matter of fact."

Jane poked her head into the bedroom and frowned. She couldn't be more confused.

"Are you sober?"

"Of course, I am. Do you really think that I am the kind of person who would show up at a pre-rehearsal wedding dinner intoxicated?"

Jane apologized. She should have known better than being sarcastic with Maura while she had just put pressure on her friend as she had told her about the importance of the pre-rehearsal dinner. She had been quite tactless. One more time.

"You don't have to become a Rizzoli martyr, Maura. It's just..." Jane grabbed her eyeliner. She loudly sighed. "I know how they are and how tough it can be to deal with them. I don't want you to suffer from that."

They may have only been separated by the thin wall of the bathroom but Maura felt an immense distance between her and Jane. Her friend was so far from the truth, so far from knowing what Roberta already knew.

...

—\*\*\*Amore: sweetheart\*\*\*

## 10. Chapter 10

—\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and messages, I'm glad to see you're liking this story so far.\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Ten\*\***

Jane had to admit that it was one of the most peaceful pre-rehearsal wedding dinners that she had ever attended. As a matter of fact, she expected the worst to happen as if what she was now enjoying was simply the calm before the storm. A glass of Prosecco in hand, she observed the joyful comings and goings in the backyard. Everyone looked happy, at the soft mercy of a delicate lightness. Even Gina didn't seem to be too stressed by the event in spite of its importance.

"So when are you getting married?"

The question barely made Jane smile. The tone Isabella had used was full of a sarcasm that Jane didn't like. Her cousin was implicitly alluding to what had happened earlier in the morning when she had walked in on them in bed. Jane focused on the mischievous flicker in her cousin's eyes: Isabella loved being right, except she was wrong this time.

"I'd need to meet someone for that, no?" Jane shrugged, with an ounce of casualness. She could be just as subtle as Isabella if she wanted to. "I'm single."

"Really?"

Jane was living one of these incomprehensible days, when the melody of existence seems to irremediably be off-key. From her surprising wake-up in Maura's arms to the way she had consciously avoided her friend until now, she felt confused and lost. Each unexpected situation had stirred up a thousand emotions that she didn't know how to handle.

A bitter vulnerability reigned over the mess her heart had quietly left behind. And it was loud; loud and atrociously visible.

"I was sleeping. Maura... I don't know. She fell on me. She can be awkward, at times. She must have lost her balance or something."

"In bed? I don't know many people who happen to lose their balance in bed. You didn't even wonder why she was so close to you in the first place?"

The rhetorical question caused Jane to blush. Isabella's sharp tone of voice was probably the one she used when defending a client. She was an attorney, after all: it was her job to confront people with what they refused to see. And she was quite good at it.

A smirk curled up Jane's lips as the realization that she had lost the game hit her. Hurt but too self-conscious to abdicate, she looked her cousin in the eye and raised her chin in a gesture of defiance.

"Nothing has ever happened between Maura and I."

The music band finished their song. Isabella waited for the applause to subdue. With this typical self-confidence that had always made Jane green with envy, she raised an eyebrow then burst out laughing.

"It could be so much different though. You have to be blind to not see it. Anyway..." Isabella took a sip of Prosecco. She sighed. "It's not easy, even less with this family, but it's worth it. Believe me."

Isabella had always been a fighter to Jane's eyes for she had managed to take her distance with a life scheme that didn't suit her. There was nothing more complicated, nothing more painful to do. But her cousin had done it with an eloquence that Jane didn't own.

"By the way, where is she? Where's Maura?"

Jane squinted her eyes. She looked on her right, then on her left, but Maura was nowhere to be seen. Her heart sped up the pace of its beats: she wouldn't allow any of her aunts to kidnap Maura again. Roberta had been sneaky but Jane was now a lot more careful. She didn't want her friend to feel forced to do anything just to please intrusive relatives.

"She's playing scopa against the men and she's actually winning. They like her. As Antonio said, she's quite cool for an Irish girl."

Jane's dark eyes widened in fear. Under other circumstances, Isabella's remark would have made her laugh quite a lot but playing

scopa was a male activity in her family. Of course, Maura couldn't know about it but Jane was certain that it would be seen as offensive by one of the guests.

She rushed to the aforesaid table without even excusing herself. She didn't need to, anyway. It was just Isabella. Trying to avoid an unnecessary conflict was way more important right now.

Just as expected, Maura was sitting at the table. She was nicely chatting with a dozen of men while playing with the old family's set of cards.

Panic passed underneath Jane's skin and caused her blood to rush through her veins.

She stayed in the background for long minutes. Thus she passed unnoticed to everyone which was exactly what she wanted. As a matter of fact, she even wished she could have disappeared for life was suddenly way too complicated. She observed her friend from this safe little bubble that she had just built for herself.

Maura's graceful traits shone in the sunset as her delicate smile lit up her hazel eyes then twirled in the air, gently embraced by her laughter.

She was at ease. There was nothing more surprising when one knew that social interactions weren't necessarily her thing. Jane passed her tongue over her lips, absentmindedly, then realized that she envied her friend's capacity to fit in so easily.

Maura belonged to an upper-social class. She hadn't grown up in the average suburbs of an average town. She had only known the best, from a very young age. Life in Staten Island couldn't be more different from her social background. Yet she was now conversing with Jane's uncles and cousins as if she had always known them, as if they were old friends.

She was succeeding where Jane had always failed.

"Jane!" Amadeo turned out to be the one who finally spotted her.  
"Your girl friend is a scopa master!"

Jane's lips curled up in a timid smile. The way her relatives kept on defining Maura as her girl friend was embarrassing. She felt uncomfortable because of the double-entendre of the word, even if she had a hard time thinking that her relatives had what it took to gently tease her about her and Maura's friendship.

For brief seconds, Maura's hazel eyes plunged into Jane's dark ones and everything stopped; everything but the beats of their respective hearts. Words weren't needed for the blurry feelings that had overwhelmed them both lie now in the bright light of the day. It didn't last. As usual, Maura and Jane simply turned their back at their emotions and resumed their endless game of hide and seek.

"I didn't know that you play."

"I spent a summer on an Italian island once, in a seaside village. The old men taught me the game... And their tricks. I hadn't played in a long while though."

Jane regretted to be wearing a dress. Her hands were burning and she wanted nothing but to make sure that they would sink in the pockets of her jeans. She clutched to her glass instead but remained desperately silent.

"\_Cazzate\*! She's not even rusty."

Francesco's remark made the group that had gathered around the table burst out laughing which brought an immense relief to Jane. She wasn't sure to understand what was going on, why all these men who usually were so desperately clutched to their Italian family rules suddenly accepted Maura to break their so-called little rituals, but she had to admit that it was heartwarming.

"Would you like to play?"

The mischievous tone of voice matched the smirk that lit up Maura's hazel eyes as she looked up at her friend. She was challenging Jane, in front of her relatives. There was nothing harmful in her offer but a visible and electric tension grew between the two of them nonetheless.

The men whistled and Jane apologetically shook her head.

"You're gonna lose, Maura. You don't know what you've just asked."

Jane wondered if her friend hadn't had too many glasses of Prosecco for she was in a very flirty mood. In public. The uncles and cousins were unaware of the signs but Jane could see each one of them which caused a warm sensation to rise in her lower stomach. She swallowed hard then pondered the offer. But could she really turn Maura down?

"Alright."

Antonio gave her his seat and went to place himself next to Maura. Jane frowned. Was her uncle cheering for someone he barely knew while he had visited Angela the day Jane was born? It was a betrayal, an Italian betrayal.

That would call for a vendetta.

"What's going on here?" Lorena's loud voice interrupted the brouhaha of conversations. The short woman made her way through the small crowd. She gasped. "\_Perbacco\_\*! \_Scopa\_ is for men in this family..." She raised her arms to the sky then dramatically shook her head before looking at Jane and Maura again. "What's next? Two suits and a cigar each?"

"What's happening? Why are you screaming?"

Roberta showed up, soon followed by a dozen of curious relatives. Jane looked down at her lap as a strong sentiment of shame passed underneath her skin. She was simply about to play cards yet her family had to make a drama out of it. As usual.

She looked Maura in the eye and murmured away the most delicate apologies.

Maura responded to them with a smile, a bright one. She was extremely amused by the scene and how Jane's aunts seemed to see in her behavior something extravagant. She took a sip of Prosecco. The alcohol warmed up her stomach and reddened her cheeks.

"You're right, Lorena." Maura stood up and grabbed Jane by the hand. "Let's go dance instead. We're celebrating an upcoming wedding, after all. Let's have fun!"

...

\_\*\*\*Cazzate: bullshit, lies\*\*\*\_

\_\*\*\*Perbacco: holy cow\*\*\*\_

## 11. Chapter 11

\_\*\*Author's note: Thank you for all the reviews and messages; Carmen will be part of the story, she should show up in the third part that starts on Sunday or Monday (I'm not sure yet).\*\*\_

**\*\*Chapter Eleven:\*\***

"What's Italian school?"

Maura bit into a homemade roll. She didn't look at Jane for her priority now was the incredible breakfast buffet Roberta, Lorena, Silvia and nonna had prepared. The day of the wedding rehearsal dinner was apparently taken very seriously in this family. Maura would have to hit the gym once she would be back in Boston though. She hadn't stopped eating here and she barely walked fifty steps a day.

"It's a school for little Italian boys and girls to meet their future spouse." Jane paused: her definition was not far from the truth but Maura being Maura, she felt the necessity to add a less sarcastic comment as well. "And learn Italian too."

"You didn't go to Italian school, did you?"

The subjective explanation Jane had given finally caught Maura's attention. With a plate full of Italian pastries, she turned around then frowned at her friend. It was very confusing: Jane was Italian thus she should have attended Italian school too yet Maura didn't remember Angela talking about it. Jane had gone to a Catholic school but an American one.

"Nope, and that's why I don't have a spouse. Do you wanna come with me? I just have to drop the kids then rush back here. It'd take me like forty minutes. It's going to be a long day, there're many things to do before the wedding."

"I can't. I promised Gina that I would help her choose her nail polish for tonight's dinner. I should have taken more nail varnish bottles, I'm not sure I have one that is going to suit a white dress."

Jane gulped down her coffee at light speed. The drink burnt her

throat and made her choke. It was 7.30am and she was already in a hurry: it was worse than Boston. Hopefully she wouldn't come across any crime scene when coming back to Roberta's place after dropping Perla and her cousins to school or else she would sue whoever assumed that she was right now on vacation.

"Gina'll be wearing green tonight, not white. It's supposed to bring luck and abundance. It's a fertility symbol. Italian women used to get married in green way back then but the white trend was too strong."

Maura knew the evolution of Italian fashion but she hadn't imagined that Jane's family would respect a tradition that seemed to have generally vanished throughout the years. She nodded then went to sit at the large table where a dozen of people were having breakfast. She didn't know most of them. As a matter of fact, she didn't even remember having seen them the evening before at the pre-rehearsal dinner. Had Roberta invited half of the neighborhood to celebrate the upcoming wedding?

"Then green it is." Maura's traits deepened as a question hit her. She squinted her hazel eyes then looked at Jane who was still standing next to her. "What kind of green? Almond green? Dark green? There are plenty of different types of green!"

"I don't know... Green...?" Jane set her empty cup of coffee down on the table. She grabbed the car keys and nodded at Roberta who was looking at her with impatience. "I'm off. Good luck with Gina. You'll see she's quite... Talkative."

Maura found the remark to be quite amusing. There was not a person in Jane's family who wasn't talkative. They never stopped, actually. From morning to night, they talked over and over as if their lives depended on the river of words that passed their lips. Maura liked it. A honest warmth emanated from their behavior, something that she hadn't got to know with her own family. The Isles seemed very cold compared to the Rizzoli's.

Cold and atrociously discreet.

...

"Have you ever got married?"

Maura looked up from her set of nail varnish bottles and found herself at the mercy of six pairs of eyes. Gina had come over with her best friends: two Maria's and three Ava's. Maura wasn't very fond of uncommon names but she had to admit that the Italian community of Staten Island cruelly lacked creativity. She had stopped counting the amount of Maria's she had come across to since she had arrived.

"Oh, no. I've never been married, actually." The general gasp her reply stirred up caused her to immediately justify her status. "But ahem... I almost got married once but it didn't happen which is a good thing because the person in question got charged with murder later on."

Maura's laugh fell flat. She stopped right away as soon as she realized that her attempt to joke had miserably failed. Gina and her friends were staring at her with an expression of shock.

"Oh God." Gina brought a hand to her heart. "And nobody else proposed to you? How come? You're beautiful and nice... And smart too."

"Maybe she's like your sister."

Gina clenched her teeth. The gesture passed unnoticed to everyone but Maura who used to observe people's reaction on a daily basis. The remark had hurt Gina but she was too proud to admit it so she played it tough instead.

"And so what? Isabella's married. They can get married now."

The harshness of Gina's tone of voice left Maura confused. She didn't know if it were supposed to highlight Gina's support to same-sex marriage or just the burning sensation of a scar that hadn't disappeared yet. She was ten years younger than Isabella but she probably remembered very well the way her parents had reacted to her sister's coming-out. How could she not? The tension was still very palpable. And then there was her 'they', the way she had pronounced it. She clearly did not identify herself to the LGBT community.

Maura pouted: Gina had either suffered from the whole thing or she just wasn't as open-minded as Roberta could be.

"I happen to have a complicated life, with a very demanding and singular job. I may simply not be made for marriage. It's okay. I'm fine with it, with the way my life now is."

"Everyone's made for marriage!"

Maura's smile didn't reach her eyes. Witnessing these young adults was strange. They were the pure product of their parents' education, of what their community had taught them since they were little girls. They had a very hard time understanding that everyone didn't necessarily want the same.

"How about this one? This Chanel red." Maura picked up a nail varnish bottle and handed it to Gina. It was better to turn the page over the current situation of her private life for she knew that neither Gina nor her friends would ever manage to accept it. "It will look great on you."

Gina's eyes widened with excitement and for a brief second Maura had the feeling that she was helping a ten-year-old girl. Jane's cousin was young and still a tad immature. Too young to get married.

"Chanel? Oh my God. You want me to wear Chanel? Like in the Champs-Elys es and all that jazz? Chanel?!"

Maura burst out laughing. Gina's reaction was very sweet. A cell phone rang somewhere in the room but none of the girls bothered checking their respective devices. They were literally hypnotized by the nail varnish bottle Gina was now holding.

"If you can't wear gold because it would bring you bad luck then why not red? A red/green combination is always a success."

A knock on the door caused all the girls to turn around. Isabella poked her head inside and gave the group a warm smile. Maura really didn't understand why Jane's family was so harsh with her. Isabella was very nice. What her relatives made her live was incredibly unfair.

"You're going to miss your spa appointment, Gina."

The future bride stood up. She rushed to her bag that she had left in a corner and adjusted the short skirt that she was wearing.

"You're right. C'mon girls." She flashed a bright smile at Maura. "The red it'll be, then. Thank you so much for everything! You're so nice, Maura."

Isabella watched her sister and her friends leave before focusing back on Maura who, overwhelmed by the sudden frenzy, had remained alone in the room.

"Jane has just come back. She's downstairs with nonna. It's harder to make sure she doesn't rush back to you right away than to convince a jury a client I'm defending isn't guilty."

Maura put back all her nail varnish bottles in the small case she had brought to Staten Island. She hadn't missed Isabella's light sarcasm but she didn't know how to react to it. Jane was right: there was something intimidating about her cousin. Isabella was kind and smiling but you were always left wondering how to interact with her.

"What is she doing?"

Isabella shrugged.

"Nothing much, actually. She's just there looking in the distance... Just like our grandmother. Maybe it's their way to speak to each other. Nonna is a woman of few words."

Maura walked outside the room and began to take the stairs down to the first floor of the house. She had got used to this place, to the carpeted floors and the dozen of religious statues and paintings. Besides, it always smells good; either pastries or some Italian dish someone had put in the oven to heat.

"You said it."

Isabella's hoarse laugh rose in the air. She followed Maura downstairs and cleared her voice as they reached the kitchen door.

"I hope you like crafty activities. We have four hundred bags of sugared almonds to fill and only two hours to do it."

## 12. Chapter 12

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and messages (I'm impressed to learn you had to get married in green, Resi!)\*\*

\*\*Chapter Twelve:\*\*

Maura closed her eyes. A soft breeze caressed her nape lovingly and matched the delicate back and forth movement of her feet whenever they brushed the grass. She had wanted to sit on the swing seat since the first time she had seen it but her schedule had been too tight until now. Relatives, wedding preparations, more relatives: she hadn't had a minute for herself.

"I loved the swing seat as a child." Timid steps led Jane to Maura. Her hands in her back, she gave her friend a smile as Maura opened her eyes back. "I thought it'd make me fly."

"Is this the reason of the scar on your chin?" Nobody could see it but Maura. Her medical examiner skills made it hard for her to miss it even if it was subtle and had now almost disappeared. "I've always wondered where it came from."

Jane sat next to her friend as soon as Maura stopped the swing seat with her feet. She stared at an invisible point in the distance then shook her head. Invisible wrinkles appeared at the corner of her lips the moment she smiled.

"Oh no. That happened in Boston, just another skateboard session that went wrong." Jane opened her fist. She was holding a small bag of sugared almonds. "Do you want some?"

Maura laughed. They had spent the last hour and a half packing the sweet treats every guest would receive as a present. Some would also serve as decoration at church. The activity would have been monotone if it weren't for Lorena, Roberta and Angela chatting loudly in the living-room. Nonna had helped them too but in silence.

"Oh, what have you done? Roberta is going to kill you if she learns you've stolen one of the bags!" Yet Maura gladly accepted an almond. It was crunchy, sweet. "Someone won't have a bag because of you, Jane."

Jane shrugged. She was in a good mood: the sky was blue and her relatives had finally decided to give her and Maura a break. Perhaps the dance both friends had shared the evening before had something to do with it. Jane hadn't said anything but she had noticed the way people had looked at them and it was louder than a thousand words in the end.

"How did it go with Gina?"

The conversation was basic but Jane didn't feel at ease. She wasn't home and even if nobody else was currently in the backyard, she felt the urge to put a distance between her and Maura. Just in case.

"Fine. She's a nice girl and we've found the perfect nail varnish for tonight's dinner." Maura picked up another almond from Jane's hand except this time she let her fingers slide on friend's skin a bit longer. Discreetly. "She's so young to get married though."

A dog barked in the distance.

"Thank you." Jane's whisper floated in the air for a while. She bowed her head and frowned before the difficulty she had to express what she now felt. "Thank you for being here."

Maura watched the almonds fall on the grass, their whiteness contrasting sharply with the green soil. Jane had accidentally let go of them. They landed there quietly, lightly.

"There's no reason to thank me. You know that I'm glad to be here."

Maura bent over and began to pick up the almonds. Jane immediately joined. In a loud silence, her hand brushed Maura's. The unexpected gesture caused her to drop the almonds again.

"Damn."

But as Maura went to pick them up anew, Jane grabbed her hand to hold it tightly. The gesture wasn't accidental, this time. The determination that made Jane's dark eyes glimmer highlighted an obvious desire. Maura sat up and looked at her friend. She felt confused and slightly dizzy for she didn't understand what was really happening.

Jane looked into her friend's eyes as if she hoped to read her soul. Then and with the delicacy of uncertainty, she leaned over and brushed the corner of her friend's mouth with her lips. She barely felt the touch, actually. Her heart was beating too loud for her to focus on anything.

"Jane!" Lorena walked out the back door and waved from the porch. "Your brothers and your nephew have arrived!"

Everything vanished within a second, from the confusion over Jane's gesture to the silence that had wrapped it up. Maura stood up first and quietly walked towards the house. Jane followed her after having picked up the sugared almonds.

The loudness of the house was exactly what Maura needed. It was the best excuse that she would ever have to mentally run away from the kiss Jane had planted at the corner of her lips. She still could feel it though. The touch burned, lovingly.

"Lydia!" She welcomed the young woman with open arms then hugged Frankie and Tommy. It was good to have another piece of Boston here. "How was your flight?"

TJ was already running around the house, trying to escape Lorena and her Italian pastries. Of course, she would try to feed him. It was the way she pretty much welcomed anyone to Staten Island. Maura hadn't forgotten about it.

"It went well, thank you."

Lydia looked intimidated by the group of women that had suddenly surrounded her. Maura felt empathy for her: Tommy's girlfriend was the only official significant other that the Bostonian side of the family had brought to the wedding. Yet they were not married.

"When do the two of you get married? You can't live as sinners all

your life. You have a child, now!"

Maura held back a laugh. It had taken five minutes to Roberta to allude to a potential wedding. Angela's grandchildren and wedding obsessions were nothing compared to her sister's. As a matter of fact, she had remained quiet over it since she had arrived to Staten Island. Maura wondered if it weren't because of her divorce. She had noticed how nobody else had put an end to a marriage in Jane's family. It was probably badly seen.

"One thing at a time, aunt Roberta." Tommy winked at his aunt and took her by the shoulders. He seemed really at ease in the house. "Gina first!"

"Of course, Gina first!" Roberta pointed the suitcases. "Frankie, you'll stay at Lorena's. Lydia and Tommy, you're at Fabio's. Go unpack... Jane, help your brothers! Maura, come over here. We're going to make some coffee."

...

Jane leaned against the door frame. She sank her hands in the pockets of her jeans and glanced at the room without saying a word. She still felt confused, and scared.

"Is everything okay?" Frankie laughed nervously. He had just dropped his travel bag on the floor of this bedroom and was now looking at Jane with an expression of uncertainty. "You look weird."

Jane scoffed but her reaction only managed to betray a latent nervousness. The kiss she had given Maura haunted her in a way she wouldn't have thought to be possible. She was confused but not ashamed though. All she could think about were Isabella's words, the ones she had shared with her at the pre-rehearsal dinner the night before.

It isn't easy but it's worth it.

Isabella was wrong, Jane knew it. Her family had taken their distance with her when she had told them that she lived with a woman but at least she had always known that Carmen was into her. Jane was not in the same situation.

She swallowed hard as the realization that she wanted something more with Maura hit her mind. It had been there for a long time but she had refused to see it, to accept it. Except she had now lost the battle with her mind. Maura wasn't just her friend and would never be.

"How do you think I should look after four full days here? We're stuck on a freakin' island with the family."

Jane tried to ignore how shaky her voice had been when she had said 'we' and rushed to hide behind a curtain of jokes. It was easier, and safer too.

"Oh, c'mon... They're not that bad. Why do you always have to exaggerate?" Frankie walked to the bathroom to wash his hands. "They're loud but they're funny. At least we have a family spirit. Everyone doesn't have this chance, you know."

A few seconds passed by during which Jane focused on the pace of her heartbeats. She had had this conversation many times in the past but her brothers would never understand what she meant, how it felt like to be a woman in this family. Frankie and Tommy had privileges that she wouldn't reach, not even in her wildest dreams.

And they were unaware of it.

It showed less in Boston because Jane had built the life she wanted there and because her own parents had been less archaic than her uncles and aunts but the difference of sexes really dragged her down whenever she came back to Staten Island. This wasn't her. This wasn't how she saw life.

"You're good?" Turning the page and pretending that nothing had happened was still the best solution that came to mind. Jane walked to the door once her brother nodded. "Then let's go or by the time we make it back to Roberta's, the kitchen'll have disappeared under a thousand Italian dishes!"

Frankie laughed patted his stomach.

"Won't be a problem. I'm quite hungry, actually."

Jane rolled her eyes. There lay another unfairness: she and Frankie had been chubby children but the remarks about the importance of a healthy weight had only been directed at her. Frankie was a boy, he was allowed to weigh more than the average kid of his age.

Jane was not.

### 13. Chapter 13

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews, advices and suggestions. I'll try to find some time to reply to your private messages tomorrow. \*\*

**\*\*Chapter Thirteen:\*\***

The decoration of the restaurant room was surprisingly elegant and not as bling-bling as Maura had imagined it to be but the real surprise was the immense garden that seemed to spread indefinitely. The setting was perfect, and romantic.

"Are you having fun? Antonio wants to dance with you, tonight." Angela rested a hand on Maura's shoulder and burst out laughing. She looked very happy. "He says Jane shouldn't be the only one you'd accept to dance with!"

The mere fact Maura had managed to drag her friend to the dancefloor the evening before was a little miracle for Jane disliked dancing and she had always turned down Maura's invitations. But against all expectations, she had showed very little resistance during the pre-rehearsal dinner and had had a lot of fun on the dancefloor too.

"Oh, yes. The buffet is excellent too." Maura raised the plate she was holding to show Angela how much food she had just picked up.

"It's the perfect rehearsal dinner."

It was. She hadn't lied. Gina and her future husband were just as ecstatic as both families. The place was fill with laughter and applause. People were so loud that we could barely hear the music the band was playing. They were celebrating with a lot of joy the upcoming union.

Someone called Angela's name, a man in his seventies whom Maura remembered to have seen the day before. Jane's mother excused herself before walking to him for a chat.

Maura went back to her table. She sat down and poured herself a glass of water. She had barely touched the wine for she wanted to remain as lucid as possible. Alcohol would have helped her to forget the strange sensation that Jane's timid kiss had stirred up though.

They had barely crossed each other since it had happened. The day had sped up its pace the moment Frankie, Tommy, Lydia and TJ had arrived and before Maura had a chance to realize it, she was attending the pre-rehearsal dinner in Queen.

"Where do you put all this food you keep on eating?" Sitting on the other side of the table, a cigarette in hand, Isabella gave Maura a playful smile. "Look at you, you're skinny."

The compliment in disguise made Maura laugh lightly. Isabella was just as slim as she was, if not more, and she ate bigger portions.

"I could ask you the same."

Where was Jane? Maura glanced at the garden but the place was too big and too crowded to notice anyone there. When Maura had left for the buffet, Jane was still sitting at the table. Yet she was now nowhere to be seen.

"She went to the bathroom."

The easiness with which Isabella guessed what was currently crossing Maura's mind caused Maura to blush. She bowed her head then pretended to focus on the samples of the different Italian dishes that she had chosen. The last thing she wanted was to sound clingy. She already spent a lot of time with Jane, or at least enough to push people to wonder if they were indeed only friends. She hadn't missed the way everyone called her "Jane's girl friend". She hadn't missed the insistent looks either.

She and Jane were constantly being observed.

"Carmen is looking forward to meeting you."

The statement surprised Maura. She remembered Roberta had told her that Carmen was invited to the wedding but the situation was such that she had assumed Isabella's wife wouldn't show up. She obviously had been wrong.

"When is she coming? Tonight?"

Isabella laughed loudly. She shook her head then took a sip of wine.

She didn't follow Maura's rules regarding her drinks tonight. There was not a glass of water at reach.

"Oh god no! My parents would never allow her to spend the night over... And I don't want to see her leave alone to go back home at the end of this dinner."

Maura understood. She found the situation to be heartbreaking and even if Jane's cousin's voice had remained neutral, she knew that Isabella was a lot more touched by the whole thing than what she would ever accept to show.

"You and Jane are the exception but then Jane is Angela's daughter. Angela's always been more... Open-minded, especially once she got a divorce. Nobody will talk about it here but nobody has forgotten either. Most of the people you see here tonight don't understand all these things. It doesn't fit their definition of a respectable existence."

An impressive amount of bitterness showed in Isabella's voice but Maura couldn't hold it against her. It was nothing but normal. However the insinuation went slightly on her nerves. Isabella had clearly let Maura understand that she assumed that she " Maura " and Jane were a couple.

They were not.

In order to avoid a conflict that she would end up regretting, Maura excused herself and walked to the dancefloor where most of the guests were hanging.

"Maura!" A very joyful Antonio walked to Maura. He grabbed her hand before pulling her towards the dancefloor. "You owe me this dance!"

Maura gladly accepted the offer. She liked dancing and wanted to have a bit of fun. Of course she still could go chat with Tommy, Lydia and Frankie but the band was playing good music and she would regret it if she didn't dance for a while.

...

"I tell you they're together... It's so obvious. Look at them!"

Jane was about to step out of the stale when she overheard glimpses of a conversation that caught her attention. She remained silent - shamefully - and as invisible as she could.

"Hmm... It's Jane, anyway. Wouldn't surprise me. We perfectly know what forty-year-old single people are." The woman laughed. "At least this girl, Maura, looks quite decent."

Jane's blood suddenly became icy in her veins. She froze and clenched her teeth. She had recognized the voices but her current state of mind prevented her from reacting. She was paralyzed by a mix of anger and fear. Shaking like a leaf, she patiently waited for the women to leave the bathroom before leaving too.

The restaurant room was empty. Everyone had gone to dance but Isabella.

"Maura's in the garden."

Jane nodded.

She let her steps lead her outside, to the dancefloor. But something was off. The harmony of the evening had collapsed and Jane felt lost.

"Ah... Jane!"

Antonio gave Jane a wink and Maura immediately turned her head to look at her friend who had joined the edge of the dancefloor. She wouldn't dance, she had even crossed her arms against her chest, but she still had come to check what was going on on this side of the garden.

She gave a brief nod at Antonio before looking Maura in the eye. It only lasted a couple of seconds though.

"Look how she twirls..." Antonio was having a blast. "Your girl friend really is a good dancer!"

And then it happened, coming from nowhere. It was so unexpected that it took everyone aback and the band even stopped playing.

"She's not my girlfriend!"

Jane's scream resonated so loudly that a large part of the guests turned to stare at her. Some seemed rather perplexed, others looked confused. Maura was mortified and on the verge of passing out. She swallowed hard and tried to ignore all these eyes that studied her from head to toe. Her heart was beating loud, too loud.

What had happened that Jane had had such outburst? It wasn't her. Besides, Antonio had been nice. He had probably only meant "female friend". The expression was ambiguous but Maura was certain that he actually saw their friendship as an innocent, platonic one.

Something must have happened, something that Maura had missed. Something that would explain the whole thing.

The silence that followed Jane's scream seemed to last forever but, little by little, a brouhaha rose and the band began to play again. Jane ran away in the opposite direction.

"I think..." Maura looked at Antonio who was still holding her hand. The man seemed to be just as confused and lost as she was. "I think I should go... She... She probably needs me right now."

"I didn't mean..." Antonio bowed his head. He loudly sighed then looked at Maura again. "I wouldn't mind, you know. You're a great person, Maura. What I know... It's 2016, after all."

If such possibility hadn't crossed his mind until now, Jane's outburst had made him realize that it meant a lot for her or else she wouldn't have had such reaction. Jane's reaction had betrayed a thousand untold feelings. Maura nodded. She gave him a kind smile then turned on her heels to catch back Jane.

Perhaps Jane had simply reached her limits. She had remained polite and quiet until now but her frustration had built up within herself. It had to be that.

Yet in all honesty, Maura wasn't very convinced by the conclusion she had just drawn. It didn't make sense, not with someone like Jane. She knew, deep inside, that the reason of her outburst was a lot more complex and that it would force them to talk about something they had carefully avoided until now.

"Where..." Breathless from the run, Maura stopped at her table and looked at Isabella who had stood up and seemed just as lost as she was. "Where is she?"

Isabella shook her head. For the very first time, her traits looked deep and dark. Anxiety had invaded her and she wasn't at ease. She had lost control of the situation and her self-confidence had literally collapsed.

"I don't know... You go on the right and I go on the left? If you find her, send me a message." She grabbed a card out of her purse. "Here's my number."

Maura's latent frustration over Isabella immediately vanished. She was glad to be able to count her, to have an ally.

#### 14. Chapter 14

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and messages.\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Fourteen:\*\***

"Jane?"

Maura walked inside the main room of the restaurant. All the guests were now having fun outside, either chatting or dancing. She was surprised by their almost complete absence of reaction when Jane had run away. Most of them had probably already forgotten about the unexpected outburst and had moved on. It was just a minor drama for them, one that had easily got lost among dozens of others.

"She went that way."

A low voice made Maura jump. She hadn't noticed the presence of anyone in the room and, as far as she knew, nobody had followed her inside either. She turned around and froze, wrapped up by a confusing surprise. Nonna was pointing to a backdoor that led to the other side of the garden.

"You... You speak?"

The old woman snorted then rolled her eyes. She had never looked as alert as she now was. Aware of the ridiculousness of her question, Maura opened her mouth to talk anew but the grandmother turned out to be faster. Faster and witty.

"Of course, I do. I'm not mute... And I tell you that Jane went that

way. She looked upset. She's never looked so upset."

Taken aback, Maura stared at Nonna as if she had lost her mind or was rising from the dead. Everyone had told her that the woman had stopped talking after the passing of her husband yet there she was now, speaking loudly and being sarcastic. Maura held back a laugh of irony: sarcasm had to run in this family's veins.

"I know... I mean, she took a remark quite badly then she ran away."

Sadness overwhelmed Maura as she realized that nobody had bothered asking the grandmother whether she wanted to go outside with the rest of the family. Thus she remained alone in this immense and empty room. All by herself.

"You're the one who makes sure Jane's a reed. Without you, she'd bow and break. Go find her and be honest with her. All these enamored looks and no action whatsoever go on my nerves. Go. Have some guts. Make Nonna happy."

Was it a prank?

Maura immediately went to check the grandmother's table. She looked for a glass or an empty bottle of alcohol that would explain the blunt remark. In vain: Nonna was frighteningly sober.

Not a single word hit Maura's mind. Thus she resumed her walking after giving Nonna a nod and headed this time towards the backdoor that Jane's grandmother had pointed to.

The woman had confused her a lot. As a matter of fact and under other circumstances, Maura would have probably burst out laughing. Nonna was witty and very well alive. Perhaps she was indeed mourning her husband, which would explain the fact she only dressed in black clothes, but she hadn't given up on life either unlike what everyone thought.

Maura pushed the door and ventured outside again. She took what seemed to be a main path and realized that she was now walking through a rose garden. It smelled good. Sadly it was plunged in the dark.

"Jane?"

There must have been a fountain somewhere on Maura's right because she could hear the running of the water from where she stood. The place was probably very beautiful.

"Leave me alone."

Maura followed her friend's voice. She didn't want to be impolite but she would never turn back on her heels and leave. Jane needed her in spite of what she implied.

She found her on a bench by the fountain, her legs folded under her. She hadn't cried, or at least her face wasn't glimmering under tears, but she nonetheless looked upset; too upset for Maura to let go and pretend that nothing had happened. Thus Maura quietly sat next to her friend and focused on the fountain for long seconds before

speaking.

"Antonio apologizes." The start of the conversation was awkward but Maura didn't know what to say. She found herself at an unknown place, facing a foreign and yet too personal situation. It wasn't easy to handle. "He wasn't teasing you."

"I know and I've overreacted. It's just..." Jane sighed. She couldn't tell Maura about the conversation she had accidentally overheard in the bathroom. She didn't have the courage it took to even allude to it. "You know how they say we don't choose our family? Well, I guess it's true. I mean I consider you as my real family but not these people. They're... We're just too different to share the same blood."

Maura remained silent. She didn't agree with Jane but she understood that she couldn't oppose herself to her friend now. The timing was wrong. Besides, she knew what it was like to spend time with relatives. Hers went on her nerves too, very easily. The reasons were simply different but the result was exactly the same.

"Do you mind if we go back home?" Jane looked down at her lap. "I mean unless you wanna stay here and have fun. You looked thrilled on the dancefloor. I can go back to Staten Island all by myself. You'll find someone to..."

"No, it's okay. Let's call it a night."

Jane's outburst had swept away any desire Maura had had to celebrate anything. She needed some time off, to relax and find back the peace that usually rocked her and Jane's friendship.

They both walked to the parking lot then drove away in the night. Maura sent a message to Isabella to let her know about their last-minute plan, to let her know that everything was alright. For once Jane even didn't complain and accepted to let Maura drive their way back to Staten Island. It was a long drive during which neither of them talked.

Maura parked on the sidewalk by the house and followed Jane inside. It was strange to witness the house so quiet. It didn't look like the place Maura had got to learn and enjoy. It barely seemed to be the ghost of what it really was.

They didn't lose time downstairs and headed straight back to their bedroom on the top floor. Maura's tiny hope over a late-night conversation vanished the moment Jane settled in bed and turned the light off on her nightstand. She rolled on her side thus turning her back at Maura.

Maura followed and turned the light off as well. It was late, well past midnight, but she didn't feel tired. She couldn't, as a matter of fact. Too many questions were twirling, too many emotions prevented her from closing her eyes.

A dog barked in the distance. She wondered if it was Allegra. Had someone walked the dog before going to the rehearsal dinner? Probably. They took great care of the Australian Shepherd.

For long minutes Maura stared at the ceiling in silence. She was

focused on Jane's regular breath, on the heat of her body next to hers. Too many things had happened today for their existence to remain the same the day after. She knew it, she could feel it even if she always said that she didn't trust her instinct. Something had shifted without them noticing it right on the moment.

She slowly turned her head to observe Jane's back in the dark, how her hair fell in cascade around her neck. Maura went to brush her friend's dark curls but stopped herself as soon as the tip of her fingers made contact with the hair. Without realizing it, she had moved closer to Jane and was now only inches away from her friend.

She didn't feel it come. Within a second, Jane had turned around and was now looking into her eyes as if she were searching for a solution to the blurriest mystery of her life. Maura didn't move. She remained still, her eyes plunged in her friend's.

Of course, Jane wasn't asleep.

"I wish..." Maura's whisper twirled up with the delicacy of summer clouds that peacefully punctuate the sky. The back of her hand came to caress Jane's cheek; lovingly, slowly. "I wish you understood."

A bittersweet smile lit up Maura's traits: she wished Jane understood that she was pretty, and smart. She wished Jane understood what echoed in her heart. She wished Jane understood all that.

Not really knowing why " out of a sweet despair, perhaps " Maura leaned over and was about to plant a comforting kiss at the corner of Jane's mouth when her friend suddenly moved forward and captured her lips with a feverish hesitation.

The unexpected touch caused Maura to gasp but she immediately responded to it, carried by the strength of this wave of warmth that had just risen within her lower stomach.

Her knee went up Jane's inner thigh as they both deepened their kiss and swept away whatever doubts were left of what was now happening.

The novelty of the sudden intimacy was electric but incredibly gentle, waves of sighs melting in a succession of kisses that grew bolder by the second. As Maura's hand slid down to Jane's nape, she rolled on her stomach and found herself on top of her friend. Her body molding Jane's.

It felt right, and intense. Overwhelming. The night had suddenly taken a different turn and seemed to open its arms to Jane and Maura, invitingly. They had all the time in the world, all their lives to be happy with each other.

A smile of hopes she had once thought were vain played on Maura's lips as she felt Jane's hand pass under the thin silk of her negligee to caress her back and slide on her soft skin with the emotions that only first times can bring up.

Then it hit her. She had been wrong all along: Jane understood. She understood too well actually for she felt the same. Irremediably.

## 15. Chapter 15

\*\*Author's note: Thank you for all the reviews and messages, I was quite busy yesterday so I didn't have a chance to answer your messages. I'm sorry, I'll try to do it later on this week.\*\*

\*\*Part Three â€“ Il matrimonio\*\*\*

\*\*Chapter Fifteen:\*\*

"It's wedding day!" Roberta scoffed. "And plug Jesus back immediately. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? We don't unplug Jesus in this house."

In spite of its brevity, Roberta's voice turned out to be loud enough to wake up Jane and Maura and by the time one of them was in full capacity to react, Angela's sister had flown out of the room in order to rush back to Gina's side. Of course she had let the door open ajar, not caring much about the sudden lack of intimacy for Jane and Maura.

Jane leaned up on her elbows and stared at the aforesaid door in silence. She had no idea how her cousins could deal with such lack of intimacy. It drove her mad whenever she visited her family in Staten Island.

"What's happening?"

Maura's sleepy voice made Jane smile. The sweet vulnerability that emanated from it was cute. She observed her friend for a couple of seconds, in silence. Maura was turning her back at her and she was rubbing her eyes, wincing as the sun that pierced through the window on her right blinded her.

"An Italian wedding's happening."

Jane was about to get up when she realized that she was still naked. Her heart began to beat faster as it hit her that Roberta could have noticed such detail if she had happened to stay a bit longer in the room or even come closer to the bed. Thankfully she hadn't done any of this.

Panicked, Jane started looking for a piece of clothing but none was at reach. She leaned over the bed and tried to pick up the old t-shirt she usually wore to sleep. In vain. She couldn't let go of the bedsheet that covered her chest and reached the piece of clothing at the same time.

"Are you alright?"

Maura's shaky tone of voice matched the hesitation with which she went to squeeze Jane's hand. Jane's frenzy at such early hours of the morning was not a good omen. Maura subconsciously bit her lower lip as she waited for a reply, or any kind of reaction. The circumstances were singular, far from what one would dream about for a "morning after".

The tension was palpable, it was very awkward.

"Well... I'm alive."

Jane finally dared to poke a foot outside of the bed. Her position was precarious but if she was quick enough then she would be able to pick up her t-shirt without revealing her body in all its glory. Anyone could walk in at any moment.

"I meant..."

"I know what you mean." Jane felt bad for she couldn't even look Maura in the eye. She didn't know anymore, the way they had abruptly woken up had made everything collapse. "Just as I know we got lucky Roberta didn't notice anything."

Against all expectations, Maura took the remark rather badly. Upset, she sat up in bed and loudly snorted to catch Jane's attention.

"I didn't know that I was a source of shame."

Jane's sentiment of victory as she grabbed the shirt turned out to be quite ephemeral. Maura's remark immediately pushed her to turn around to look at her friend with concern.

"What?" She quickly put on her shirt. "You're not a... Source of shame! It's just... Ugh." Jane ran a hand through her messy hair. "There's nothing pleasant in the idea of someone walking in on you."

At least they now were talking. Maura smirked: they were talking with the same easiness as they had always showed. It was comforting because what had happened during the night would have an impact on their life, no matter their upcoming decisions. But since she was in a playful mood, she crossed her arms against her chest and went to test Jane a bit.

Just to see, to lighten up the situation. Perhaps it was all what they needed.

"Oh why do you always have to exaggerate? We're both adults. I didn't force you and you didn't force me. Well... You kissed me but..."

Jane gasped. She either hadn't noticed Maura's desire to tease her or she had decided to play along with an impeccable subtlety. Her eyes went from right to left then from left to right with a frenzy that betrayed her inner panic and confusion.

"I certainly didn't. You kissed me! You're the one who leaned over and..."

Maura burst out laughing. She was in a good mood and found their uncommon morning conversation hilarious. It was just another way to pretend that nothing was serious, that they could allow themselves to be light. It was reassuring.

"I was going to kiss your cheek, Jane. You're the one who suddenly moved and..." Maura shrugged and bit the inside of her cheek to hold back a smile. "Well, you know."

"Whatever! And it doesn't change anything to the fact Roberta could have seen us which is embarrassing. And confusing. I mean... Oh, what do I know? This house isn't fond of kinky rendez-vous, one-night stands and all."

Maura was adjusting her negligee when Jane's choice of words stopped her. A bitter smile played on her lips as she had to accept the fact that, in spite of her efforts, they were reaching the limits of what she saw as an innocent morning banter game.

"Is it how you see it? Is it what it is for you?"

She would accept it. She didn't want it to be a once in a lifetime thing but if it was how Jane felt about it then she would respect her friend's implicit decision. Maura was fine with one-night stands, she even thought they suited her better than a real relationship in the end, yet she was afraid a wave of bitterness would overwhelm her if Jane confirmed that it was how she saw things. It had counted for her; a lot. Too much?

Jane's shrug and the silence that followed made Maura fear the worst but because the circumstances were delicate, she did her best to hide her latent panic.

"Do you regret it?"

If Jane said yes then it would be a lot worse than the idea of a one-night stand. They hadn't talked during the night. They had kissed, made love then had fallen asleep in each other's arms with a sweetness that still caused a wave of warmth to rise within Maura's stomach.

"No." Jane shook her head. She had cowardly focused on her lap, the abstract drawings that the bedsheets had embraced because of her constant moving. "No, I don't regret it."

A loud knock on the door made them jump. Although this time nobody walked in, Lorena's voice loudly rose on the other side of the door.

"Get up, girls! There's a wedding waitin' for us! You're needed."

...

Jane noticed the way Frankie held back a laugh the moment she walked into the room but she couldn't be mad at him. Nope. She had seen her reflection in the mirror of the lobby in spite of her numerous efforts to avoid it and her brother was right: she was laugheable right now.

"Please. Don't say anything."

A glass of Campari in hand, Frankie tilted his head then squinted his eyes to observe her sister. He leaned against the back of an armchair with a casualness that took Jane aback. How could her brother be so relaxed in a house that was now giving a brand new definition to the word "stress"? Everyone was yelling, in every single room. And running too. The house had turned into a giant mess: an irreversible chaos was near.

"It's... Pink."

She looked down at her dress, that dress she didn't want to wear. Frankie was right: it was pink and fluffy, just like cotton candy. She was mortified to be seen in this. Maura had tried to make it look better but it was just impossible. The dress was ugly and she, Jane, looked now just as ugly. She went to run a hand through her hair but remembered that she had tied it up in a bun. The realization was frustrating for she was trapped in a terrible piece of clothing and couldn't even move an inch.

"Where's Maura?" Tommy came closer to his siblings. He was holding TJ in his arms and seemed to be just as relaxed as Frankie. It had to be a men thing. "I haven't seen her yet. She'd be easy to spot among all these Italians though!"

Jane went straight for her nephew. TJ was exactly the kind of diversion that she needed. She took him in his arms in spite of one of her aunts' warning that the little boy would probably damage her dress. Jane politely smiled at Silvia then eagerly nodded at TJ.

"Do it! C'mon, TJ! Rip this horror off." She glanced at Tommy. "Maura's upstairs, she's getting ready... Unless the constant yelling made her run away through the window. She can do it: she likes rock climbing."

They hadn't continued their conversation after Lorena had knocked on the door. Time was running against them and Jane knew better than to piss off a whole community of Italian-Americans on a wedding day. Thus she had got up right away and had rushed to the bathroom to have a shower.

Could people in the house see on her face "read in her eyes" what had happened during the night between her and Maura? Was it somewhat visible?

She had slept with a woman, with her best friend. She didn't regret it but it caused a thousand unanswered questions to make her heart beat faster. The frenzy of the day was a delicate one to handle and it certainly didn't match the peace she needed to sort things out, to know what she really wanted. Or better said, how to find the courage to embrace it.

"C'mon, TJ! Be a nice little boy and make sure your auntie can't wear this dress anymore. C'mon, use your little claws, or even your teeth. Do it!"

...

\*\*\*Il matrimonio: the wedding\*\*\*

16. Chapter 16

\*\*Author's note: Thank you for all the reviews and messages, I'm glad to see you're enjoying the story so far.\*\*

\*\*Chapter Sixteen:\*\*

The ribbon was dancing in the wind with a graceful silence. Amused, Maura observed it for a while. The large bowed ribbon was draped across the top of the doorway of the church indicating to everyone who passed by that a wedding was about to take place.

It was the tradition though Maura was certain that most of Staten Island knew that it was the big day for Roberta and Francesco's daughter since most of them were currently gathering in front of the church. The place was crowded, full of Italians who were dressed over the top.

Maura spotted Jane among the crowd of fluffy pink dresses. It was like a giant bubble gum had just burst out over a dozen of Italian-American women. In her pale blue satin dress, Maura felt almost invisible compared to all the bright colors most of people wore. Jane had said that Maura's elegance was discreet, and full of charms. These were the last words they had exchanged before Jane had been forced into a limousine with the rest of her female cousins.

"Impressively tacky but oh so joyful. Am I wrong?"

A foreign voice caused Maura to jump. Surprised by the sudden intrusion in her bubble of thoughts, she turned around to face her interlocutor. A tall, dark-haired woman was smiling at her. Maura didn't miss the quality of the clothes she was wearing nor the discretion she showed. Then she immediately understood.

"Are you Carmen?"

"I am." The woman shook Maura's hand. "And you are Maura. Isabella told me that you were the poor soul who didn't look Italian."

Carmen burst out laughing. Her laugh was bright just as the smile that now lit up to her eyes was. Maura took her time to observe her as if she wanted to keep in mind these traits she had fantasized about these past few days. Carmen reminded her of Gina Lolobrigida. She should fit among this crowd of Italians - she was Italian, after all - yet she carefully kept her distance for she knew way too well that her mere presence there could be a great source of unwanted dramas.

"They don't bite but are terribly exhausting." Carmen's smile vanished as the weight of her statement cruelly sank in. She swallowed hard then grabbed Maura by the arm. "Let's go sit inside. As Jane must have told you, we are supposed to sit with the guests. We aren't family."

Maura wasn't but Carmen was. The wedding band that she wore on her left hand was enough to prove it. The unfairness of the situation painfully tightened Maura's heart. She nonetheless followed Carmen inside and pretended that everything was alright.

It was a day of celebration, of joy. She couldn't impose what would probably be an umpteenth heated conversation about Isabella's marriage. Even Carmen looked fine, besides. She must have been used to it.

"It's good to finally meet the infamous Maura. I may never go to Staten Island, I definitely know who you are. Angela talks a lot

about you, Jane as well."

The mention of her friend's name made Maura look for her in the crowd that had now gathered inside. Sadly the amount of bright pink dresses was too important for her to spot Jane.

It was a strange day. The wedding everybody had talked about for the past few weeks was finally about to happen but the last events of the night plunged Maura in an invisible world of silent doubts. She felt dizzy, and overwhelmed. She needed to talk to Jane, to spend some quiet time with her. Sadly it wasn't about to happen.

Of course they wouldn't define anything yet for Jane needed some time to sort things out. As a matter of fact, Maura needed this time as well, for the exact same reasons. The fact her friend didn't regret their night had been an immense source of relief and she, Maura, felt just fine about it. She was actually happy, very happy. She only wished she had had the possibility to spend a quiet day with Jane and not with the entire population of Staten Island.

"I am sorry that I couldn't meet you any time earlier." Carmen barely glanced at the programme that she had found on her seat. The ceremonies were all alike anyway. "I've had a lot of work, this week."

"What's your job?"

Maura paused and tried to remember if Isabella or anyone had actually let her know what Carmen did in life. The bare mentions of Isabella's wife had been way too oriented to give space and time to what Jane's family would probably see as insignificant details.

"I am an architect, an urban architect."

An architect and an attorney: it surely explained how Carmen and Isabella had been able to afford their Upper-East-Side penthouse. They didn't have a child. Maura assumed that both women were too dedicated to their respective jobs to ever think about maternity. They had a cat, just as she " Maura " had Bass. The parallels caused her to blush.

"Would you like to marry Jane?"

The discretion of Carmen's whisper didn't reach Maura. She immediately blushed and glanced at the two people who had just sat next to her. She hoped that they hadn't overheard the question.

"Oh... I don't know."

She honestly didn't. For years she had thought that marriage wasn't made for her but now that things may have changed between her and Jane, Maura wasn't sure anymore. It was too early to say, of course, but what she had seen at some point as a very foreign idea was slowly turning into a vague possibility.

She let the question sink in and all the little things that gravitated around the few words Carmen had said: the reason why she " Carmen " had asked in the first place, Isabella's probable conversation she had had with her wife and during which she had told

her that she thought Maura and Jane were a couple.

"At least if it ever happens, I know you won't force anyone to wear one of these awful pink dresses... You strike me as someone who has a minimum of common sense and a great fashion taste!"

Carmen burst out laughing. Too intimidated and too polite to ever be noticed, Maura giggled but still gave Isabella's wife a nod. She leaned over to whisper back in Carmen's ear.

"I wouldn't wish this to my worst ennemy."

...

Just as Orpheus and Eurydice, Jane felt the urge to turn around and look at Maura but she knew that if she did, everyone would notice her and rumors would start anew. It burned though: at the base of her nape, in her fingers and in her feet. She needed to see Maura, she needed to look into her eyes and let her know in silence that everything would be alright.

"Did you like it? It's different, isn't it?"

In another reality, Jane would have sat next to Maura. But in the Rizzoli reality, she had had no choice but to sit among her cousins. Landing next to Isabella had been pure coincidence but at least she wouldn't annoy her with makeup and fairytale stories that her other cousins seemed to be so fond of.

Isabella would simply be sneaky.

"What're you talkin' 'bout?" Jane took a sharp breath as she noticed how thick her accent suddenly was. It had betrayed her nervousness which was the kind of details Isabella wouldn't miss. "I..."

"Please tell me you didn't freak out nor run away. You're a homicide detective, you chase bad guys all day long. I refuse to believe that you're unable to face your desires when they finally show up."

The day Jane had met Constance Isles for the first time, she had immediately thought about Isabella and how both women would get along. They were direct and unafraid. Jane somehow envied them.

The brouhaha of the church covered Jane's silence for a while but she soon came to the conclusion that she had to reply. One way or another. Isabella deserved an answer. Maura deserved an answer. Staying quiet would sound like a betrayal.

"Why? Is it supposed to be the same?"

Isabella laughed. She had grabbed the wedding programme and was now using it as a fan. The temperatures were hot in the church because the place was crowded. Of course, there was no air conditioned. It was an old church, an authentic one.

And how did Isabella know, besides? Had she guessed? Jane winced as she felt uncomfortable. Of course her cousin had guessed. She was a good observer.

"Gosh, how do you want me to know? I've slept with one guy in college

and I was utterly drunk. Needless to say I don't remember any of it and I'm really glad I don't. I'm... Ew. Nope."

The casualness of Isabella's comment reassured Jane. Her cousin was the first one to know that she had slept with Maura. She had admitted it through half-words only but it was still to be considered as a giant step forward. Jane closed her eyes. Her hands were moist and her heart was beating fast.

"I wish we've had more time for ourselves though."

"That won't happen here. Staten Island and privacy are two notions that don't match; not when you're from our family. Why do you think I live in Manhattan? Well..." Isabella pouted. "Even without the family I've landed, I wouldn't want to live here but you know what I mean."

Of course Jane knew. Her mother was a lot less intrusive than Roberta and Lorena but she was Italian nonetheless. Gosh, she even lived at Maura's and worked in the BPD building.

"We have barely talked..."

Jane missed the smile that played on Isabella's lips, the light that flickered in her eyes as she pounded her cousin's words and wisdom that seemed to embrace her graceful traits. She had the experienced Jane lacked. She knew about these doubts and how to handle them.

She quietly set the programme down on her lap then turned her head to look Jane in the eye.

"Sometimes words aren't needed. Sometimes it's so obvious that you just have to let it go and start living."

## 17. Chapter 17

\*\*Author's note: Thank you very much for all the reviews and messages (this story isn't M rated so I don't think I'll go very far in graphic scenes, sorry).\*\*

**\*\*Chapter Seventeen:\*\***

"She's our daughter, and she deserves to be just as happy as her brothers and sisters." Roberta clenched her fists. She glanced at her husband, angrily, then hissed "Carmen is a nice girl... Don't you dare to say anything to her. Not today. Never."

Something had pushed Roberta to confront her husband with his views, something she couldn't name but that she still could feel within herself. She was tired of all these untold things, of the silence kept over Isabella's marriage.

Gina's wedding had been a wake-up call. They hadn't attended Isabella's own wedding and it broke Roberta's heart.

Francesco didn't say anything back but the way he pursed her lips betrayed his inner frustration. He had remained just as discreet as his wife when he had noticed Carmen's presence at Russo's but it certainly didn't please him the least.

"I've invited her. She's family." Roberta turned on her heels, ready to leave. "Deal with it."

Her menacing tone of voice melted into a scream of surprise as she spotted a friend across the room. She rushed to the aforesaid person and warmly opened her arms for a hug as if nothing had happened. Francesco didn't follow her. He remained by the doors and observed Carmen and Isabella from a safe distance.

"You think she's right, hmm?"

Angela had witnessed the scene but she had preferred to remain neutral until now. The last thing she wanted was to be responsible of an upcoming drama. It was Gina's day. She didn't want to ruin it because of this.

She nodded but remained quiet. Isabella and Carmen were at the same table as Maura and Jane. If Jane was nowhere to be seen, Maura â€“ however â€“ was in full talk with Carmen. She looked delighted. At ease. It warmed up Angela's heart.

"Is it because of your daughter? Because of Jane?" Francesco's grumpy tone of voice rose quietly in the air. "Because she's like Isabella?"

A mysterious smile played on Angela's lips and went to reach her eyes. She shrugged and pondered the question with a lot of seriousness. Francesco waited as if Angela's answer may bring up the key element that he desperately needed.

"No. I agree with Roberta because I'm fine with it, whether it's Jane or anyone else. Look at your daughter. Doesn't she look happy? In love? You should be proud, because she leads a lovely life. She's succeeded at the most important things in life."

Angela bit her lower lip as a wave of remorse invaded her. She bowed her head, almost shamefully, and focused on her stilettos. What she had just said to Francesco was exactly what she wanted Jane to know. She, Angela, had tried to tell all this to her daughter but with too much subtlety. Hopefully one day Jane would understand that it was okay, that what she felt for Maura wasn't shameful nor worth behind hidden, that Angela accepted it.

"She's even Italian, Francesco..."

The remark made Angela's brother-in-law laugh ironically. He sank his hands in the pockets of his tuxedo then shook his head.

"An Italian from Queens. This ain't the same at all, Angie."

Angela rolled her eyes but didn't miss the light tone Francesco had used this time. He was slowly accepting the situation, she could feel it. At last.

...

Jane went to sit back at her table. She didn't even bother hiding the grin of satisfaction that now lit up her traits. However, she reacted to Maura widening her eyes in shock.

"What?" Playing the innocent victim wouldn't work much but Jane was in a good mood. She had managed to get rid of the ugly pink dress, after all. It was a full success. "I spilled red wine on it so I had to go and change."

"You rarely drink red wine."

Jane's smile vanished behind the glass of beer that she brought to her lips. Maura had a point. Of course her remark was anything but innocent. The reproach was implicit, and fair enough.

"Now we all know why I rarely do." Disappointment showed on Maura's face. "Oh, come on! I'm still wearing a dress. Isn't it the most important in the end?"

A much prettier dress, besides. Jane had hurried to their car to change into a classic blue navy dress. She didn't mind wearing dresses, at least for special occasions like Gina's wedding, but she would never accept to wear a pink one for a whole day. She had her limits and a self-esteem she didn't want to ruin.

Their little banter made Carmen burst out laughing. She hadn't missed the slightest bit of it and looked very amused.

"Isabella changed her outfit too."

Maura's hazel eyes fixed upon the suit that Jane's cousin was now wearing. It was strange to see a woman who wasn't Jane wear pants yet Maura had to admit that Isabella looked fabulous in her Versace outfit. Everyone had noticed the feminine elegance that embraced the attorney. She had defied the family rules with an impeccable sobriety.

Yet Maura was very proud to see that Jane had nonetheless decided to wear a dress for it happened too rarely for her taste.

"Oh, I know. She simply didn't have to lie to me in order to do it."

Maura was in a good mood. The wedding ceremony had been beautiful and she was ecstatic to take part in her first Italian wedding dinner now. Jane had driven to Queens but Perla and two other children had decided to be part of their journey as well. Thus they had been unable to speak nor share the mere smile, as subtle as it could have been. Their lack of intimacy was cruel and oddly exciting at the same time.

The schedule of their day was too tight for them to do anything. They would have to show patience before being able to have this face-to-face they both wanted right now.

"I didn't do it on purpose!" Jane started whining like a little girl but she didn't fool anyone. "Alright... Maybe just a bit... Ouch!"

Maura's gentle slap on Jane's forearm turned out to be louder than expected. Maura blushed as she realized that it was the first contact she had made with Jane since their last kiss earlier during the night. She looked down at her lap and held back a laugh. She had

never been very good at being romantic with anyone.

"Are you leaving tomorrow?"

Isabella's question didn't have a specific interlocutor but Jane turned out to be the one who cleared her voice and straightened up on her seat. She looked at her cousin and discreetly let her left hand go rest on Maura's knee.

"We leave on Monday. Roberta told me the festivities wouldn't be over by Sunday. Please don't let this be a new tradition of some sort."

Her gentle gesture passed unnoticed to everyone but Maura. She froze the moment she felt Jane's fingertips slide on top of her satin dress. She desperately tried to catch back her breath. The boldness of the gesture had taken her aback so much that she would have been unable to speak even if asked to.

She didn't look at Jane. She remained focused on her plate instead and wondered what kind of questions were currently dancing in her friend's head, what her daring gesture had stirred up within herself.

"Oh, yes. The brunch." Isabella nodded. She was unaware of the storm of emotions that had rushed over her cousin and Maura and remained desperately casual. "I suppose I'll have to be there too."

"Hide your enthusiasm."

The sharpness of Carmen's remark surprised Jane and Maura a lot. They both turned their heads to stare at Isabella's wife in disbelief. Carmen almost seemed to reproach Isabella her obvious aversion for her family when Jane and Maura thought that she had all the reasons to speak the way she did.

"They're still your family, Liz. I know they're not... Thrilled by our marriage but make an effort. You may regret this grudge at some point."

The silence that followed highlighted the awkwardness of the situation. Thankfully not a single guest had overheard Carmen. Maura cast a desperate glance at Jane. She had quickly forgotten the burning emotions that her friend's hand on her knee had caused her to feel. They had to say something, to not let the situation drag them all down. It was a wedding day, after all. They had to be happy.

"It's Maura's first Italian wedding, ya know."

A smile played on Jane's lips as she looked at her cousin and her wife yet it didn't reach her eyes for she knew that her remark was anything but interesting. Besides, Isabella and Carmen already knew this detail. It wasn't Jane's fault though. She simply tried to lighten up the atmosphere a bit.

"You don't have to worry, Maura. An Italian wedding is just like any other wedding... Only louder and with more food than you'll ever see in your whole life. I hope you had a light breakfast this morning because you're about to eat, and eat."

Maura was about to say something back to Carmen's humorous remark when something pulled on her sleeve. Perla was standing by her side. The little girl pointed at her stilettos.

"You have beautiful shoes again."

Perla was a cute little girl, too princess-ish for Jane's taste but Maura had grown very fond of her. She gave a bright and warm smile to Perla before looking down at her stilettos.

"Thank you. However, I will need them today thus you can't leave with any of the two right now."

Maura hadn't forgotten what had happened on the day of her arrival: the last time Perla had liked Maura's shoes, it had taken Maura fifteen hours to get one back.

End  
file.